TRIBEBOOK:

SCARGAZERS™

LEGENDS OF THE GAROU

At the Tower of Silence

"Because no one can remain actionless, even for a moment.
Everyone is driven to action, helplessly indeed."
— Bhagavad-Gita, 3:05

Ko-zin of the Quiet Repose carried her body over his shoulder as his leg wept pus and blood. Night was falling over the barren landscape, and far off in the distance flickered lights from the Iranian city of Yazd. There was a faint wind, and above the moon was the barest sliver of ivory tucked amidst a fishing net of stars.

Ahead, the ground swelled and rose up into a massive, natural tower of earth and stone — a dry, blood-colored configuration called the Tower of Silence. The climb would be long and hard, he recognized, and looked down for a moment at the deep, dark gash in his thigh. Watery fluid crept from the cut, and it moistened his fur and made it stink of disease. Idly, he wondered how long before they would come for him. How long had they been following him now? Almost a week, at least. Perhaps they wouldn't find him. But probably, they would.

Ko-zin took a deep breath, the gray fur of his chest swelling out for a moment. He exhaled, centering himself for the task ahead. Such an unpleasant task. One he had seen too many times of late, but still could not get used to. He gritted his teeth. It was time to go up to the Tower of Silence, to say goodbye to his friend, to the last of his pack. A valediction of mourning.

Softly sighing, Ko-zin began the ascent.

• • •

The bamboo rod whistled through the air, and bit deep into the back of his thighs. Ko-Zin, no more than seventeen years of age, winced and bit back tears.

Behind him, Master Nirrti was little more than a shadow in the half-light of dusk that came in through the open-air windows. Ko-Zin's muscles ached, his body screamed in electric shrieks. How long had he been standing here? He thought he remembered starting this in dawn. But it was hard to remember. Things were muddy, now, and his body wept with blood from a hundred cuts. All from that cursed bamboo rod.

"You aren't concentrating," Master said, and struck again with the rod. This time on the small of his back, where a collection of other lash marks gathered. Tears dammed up at the corners of Ko-Zin's eyes. "And you're growing angry. Tired. That is not acceptable. Your muscles twitch. The corners of your eyes are red. How do you expect to remain tranquil in the face of evil? Kung-Kung is the most terrible enemy. How will you find your repose if you cannot concentrate?"

The rod struck again. Ko-Zin's flesh above the shoulder opened and ran with fresh crimson. He made a sound, a slight whimper.

"No sound," Master Nirrti chided. "You shouldn't even be feeling this. Our feelings only serve as distraction from our protection of the Emerald Mother. If She dies and us with Her, then it is your fault for being rash and embracing your imbalance."

The aged Stargazer monk circled around to Ko-Zin's front. He still marveled at how old the man looked. A withered shrub of a werewolf, and yet every strike of that bamboo felt like it was swung by a monster. Nirrti blinked, and sighed.

"I am not convinced you are worthy of this tribe," Master said, and swung again. The rod drew a gash across Ko-Zin's forehead. His legs couldn't hold him and he fell to his knees, burying his face in his hands. Blood streamed through the fingers. Nirrti clucked his tongue in disapproval, and that one sound was enough. Ko-Zin felt bile rise in his throat and fire engulf his guts. Before he knew what was happening his body tore free of the human flesh and became a hulking gray brute. He leapt for Master, jaws snapping.

He awoke, several hours later. He was back to form, a gangly human without a sprout of hair on his whole body. He was on the ground in the temple. The bamboo rod lay across his chest. Failure assailed him.

• • •

At the top, vultures waited. Dark birds, bigger than Ko-zin had expected. They shuffled eagerly from foot to foot. Beaks clicking. There must've been twenty of them. He reminded himself that they were supposed to be here. This was their home. Their job. It was proper.

He set her body down in the center, pondered for a moment unraveling the soft white wrapping that tightly encompassed her form, if only to show her face one last time so he might kiss her eyes closed or press his forehead to hers — but he held back. This was tradition. The way of her people. Despite her Garou nature, she still held firmly to the tenets and beliefs of her culture, and there was no way he would stand between anyone and their familial inclinations.

The body, according to Zoroastrian law, must remain unspoiled. Uncontaminated by external things. Hence the Tower of Silence. Here, bodies were laid out for the wind, the sun, the rain. *And the vultures*, he reminded himself, watching the dark birds watch him. The body would decay naturally, and go back to Gaia as purely as possible. It was an admirable thing. She was a beautiful creature.

Standing up, Ko-zin limped over to a torch that had been situated in a hole in the rock. The scent of oil filled his nostrils as he intoned an entreaty to the spirits of fire, and within moments light and heat flared up as darkness settled around them.

He shooed away a brave vulture, already seeking the carrion of his packmate's flesh. He chided the bird. "Don't be so impatient, vulture. You'll get your turn soon enough. But for now, I wish to have some time to make peace with my friend." And he hunkered down next to the cocooned body, and wiped his wolfen eyes.

"Daitya," he said. "Moon-Laughter. You're the last of my friends." He traced a claw along the contours of her cheekbones beneath the cloth. "We buried Guanyin in... how long has it been? April, I believe. Five months previous. She was a merciful one, wasn't she? I remember when we were younger how she saved your hide after you got into trouble with that Monkey King." He laughed. "Guanyin was good. Her death was a waste, so unexpected. A silver arrow, straight to the eye. We should've been better than that, all of us."

He idly fingered the two blades — *wakazashi* — tied at his side with black cloth. For but a moment, he pictured himself curling his talons around the hilts and cutting into himself, carving his own body into bloody cubits. He capped the anger quickly, snuffing out the flame of rage that threatened to turn into a conflagration. That was the nature of rage. *It must lie dormant*, he scolded himself. *Let that dragon sleep*. He calmed and continued talking.

"At least Jimmu-Tenno Dream-sword died in battle. His blade felled many before they swarmed him. Chitinous, ugly things. Demons from the bowels of *Kung-Kung*. The Wyrm." He spat. The saliva smacked against the red rock and again he felt the rage flicker and sputter within him. Ko-zin quashed it. "But he protected us. Stayed behind so we were able to get over the Kagutsuchi Bridge and into the Second World. We escaped. You and I, together.

"We saw Shigalu fall through our dreams. Do you remember? Of course you do. Those images still haunt me. So many of us, dead for no cause, surprised by that monster Zhyzhak and the demon minions of the Wyrm. We lost so much that day. And all those bodies of our tribe, buried in holes or thrown down the slopes of the mountain. Our spiritual heart stopped beating that day." He pressed the flat of his hand to the fur at his chest — he could barely feel his own heart beating. Part of it was the mastery over his own body, which allowed him to regulate his heartbeat (and sleep patterns, and muscle control) with pinpoint precision. But he couldn't help but wonder if another part of it was that he was just a little bit dead inside. First, Guanyin and Jimmu — then, Shigalu. And now, Daitya Moon-Laughter, his most loved, his best friend. *My heart does not beat as fast because my heart is dying*, he decided. Along with his friends. Along with his tribe.

Sadness tugged at him this time instead of his anger. Despair was a great mouth threatening to chew him up and swallow him into darkness, where he would be digested until the end of the world. Other wolves called it Harano. He did not know what to call it, only that it was most certainly *not* the Way, and that it was the one path that was sure to lead to nowhere. He was not on that unsightly path. Not yet. But he felt it calling to him, pulling at him, trying to eat him up alive like a hundred-thousand vultures. He was carrion, he thought grimly, just like Daitya. Worm food, Daitya might have said, making light of the situation as she always did. Or, perhaps, even more amusingly, *Wyrm food*. He almost laughed. Almost. But then her voice (and the joke with it) was gone on the wind.

Again he contemplated taking his anger and using it to cleave his sadness in twain, chopping himself into hateful bits. He could take the vultures and destroy them. He could sharpen his claws on the blood-colored rock of this Tower of Silence until his fingers had been worked down to crimson nubs. Or he could sit here, he imagined, and wait for her body to dissipate with time (and with help from the birds), and maybe then they could come for him too, and at last he would know the truth of peace.

He was about to begin speaking to Daitya again, but then it came to him — a scent, an odor, an acrid tang burrowing up into his nostrils as the wind kicked up. And then it was gone again, but it stayed with him in his mind and he knew just what it was he was scenting. They had come. They had found him, at last.

• • •

Seven lifetimes ago, Ko-Zin was not Ko-Zin. He was Mercy-of-Dragons, a lupus healer, small and unknown among the many Stargazers of the Middle Kingdom.

His pack was dead, except for Nezha, but who knew where she had gone? She had turned her back on them all and given up. He smelled the air to see if he could catch her scent. But he only smelled flesh burning. The work of those black Wyrm-wolves. Throwing still-living human babies into a pyre of wood

and books. Burning them. Then hunting down the cubs of his own kin, felling them with arrows laced with bitter mushroom poisons. *Be calm*, he reminded himself. *Rest in the knowledge that you bring balance to the world by example. Do not give in. Your friends and kin will be born again and you shall meet in other worlds.*

He emerged from the scrub foliage, and found the Holy River Ganges spilling muddy past the lean banks. He nuzzled briefly at the terrible wound scouring his belly, and he padded cautiously into the river waters, wincing with each step. He went as far as he could into the sluggish waters without losing his footing or sinking below nose-level and let the flowing cold wash over him.

It was hard to say how long he stood there, the water running into his belly wound and soothing it. He felt it healing up, slowly. But then a twig-snap preceded the grim heady smell of sweat and blood, and he saw two of them emerging from the same spot he came from. Wyrm-wolves in full battle form, lean jackal-headed black beasts with crude axes rusty with red. They saw him immediately as they came through the treeline. Their awful muzzles stretched into toothy grins and they waded into the waters.

Mercy-of-Dragons turned to go to the other side of the river, regardless of the current, because once on the other side, he was confident he could outrun them. But then he saw them. Three more of the black beasts, stepping slowly into the waters.

He thought of darting into the waters and letting the river carry him away. He thought too of attacking first, leaping for one of their throats and tearing it open. But then a voice of his own making but fresh from his elders came floating up from the back of his consciousness. *Remain still. Remain at peace. Show them the dignity and balance that they are too tainted to find.*

Then the last words: *Die well, Mercy-of-Dragons. See you again.*

The Wyrm-wolves leapt for him, and he held his head high, his eyes open and unblinking. He took a deep breath into his lungs as they fell on him. They chopped downward with their axes and he felt the rough blade hew into his body. They cut him to ribbons. His pieces floated down the river, bloody and apart.

• • •

Truth was, they were coming for her, not for him. Daitya, if the prophecies and spirits were to be believed (and sometimes they were; sometimes they weren't), she was the latest incarnation in a long line of Wyrm-slayers. Her last was the balancer, *Ra-Herakhty*, and before that, the spirit-dancer called Aaron Two-Crane. Her lineage went all the way back to the Stargazer hero Feridun, the full moon warrior who battled the evil king Zohak, an ancient servitor of the Wyrm. Her life was spent in struggle with Zohak, and even as Daitya she often led the pack on quests to dismantle the depredations the sleeping demon had helped to wreak upon the unsuspecting world. He was an enemy of Gaia, and Daitya would not let her Emerald Mother fall to the depredations of such demons. It was her charge to defeat Zohak and his ilk, but so far she hadn't been able to. Not in any of her incarnations. It made Ko-zin very sad.

He stood on the lip of the Tower of Silence, his claws curling over the edge. Out there, upon the darkened, cracked plain, he saw the dark figures illuminated by shuddering torchlight and electric lanterns. The wind kicked up again, and this time the smell was unmistakable. He tuned his senses, even though he knew he didn't have to, and the stench of the Wyrm was enough to cut straight through to his brain. His eyes watered. *How many are out there?* he wondered. *One hundred? Two hundred?* Maybe more. It was hard to tell in the dark like this, especially with Luna being little more than a fingernail clipping up within the firmament of night.

There was the sound of a gunshot, and a small rock the size of a softball split about two feet from Ko-zin's feet. They saw him, he saw. Another shot split the air, and he heard the clap of the bullet's thunder not far from his ear. He didn't flinch, didn't move. They'd be using silver. One shot, to the head or the heart, and it might be over for him. He accepted that.

Some of them were shuffling closer to the Tower, he could see now. Only a few probably had guns — the rests were peasants. Pig ranchers, opium growers, mine-sweepers. Anyone in this tortured, tired land who left themselves open for Zohak to corrupt (in turn opening the door for the Wyrm) could fall. Zohak grew ever stronger. Maybe that severe red eye in the sky was the cause of Zohak's sudden surge in strength. Or maybe it was the other way around. It didn't matter. None of it mattered anymore. The army was comprised of demonic servitors, shambling almost-humans consumed with hate and malice. Ko-zin patted his chest loudly, felt his heart give a quick kick against his breastbone. He wanted them to come for him!

"Kill me," he whispered to the wind. "Drink my blood, for it will poison you all." He smiled mirthlessly, his fangs grinding together. Death was coming for him. He welcomed its grip.

• • •

"How old was he, truly?" Daitya asked? The boat bobbled before them in the serene waters of the lake. Master Nirrti's dark-skinned body lay on it, his *chakra*-points decorated with the muted blossoms of the Lotus plant.

Ko-Zin crossed his arms. "I don't know, exactly. At least a hundred. Perhaps more." He shrugged. "Probably more."

Daitya leaned against him and rested her cool brow on his shoulder. He felt warm tears against his skin. He jerked away. Daitya stared at him in surprise and shock.

"What?" she asked. "What is it? Are you all right?"

"You're crying," he said.

"Yes. So? Why?" She wiped her eyes with the back of her small hand.

He frowned. "There should be no tears. No crying over this. Why are you crying? You didn't even know him!"

Daitya laughed softly. "I know you didn't like him, but—"

"That's not it," he protested. "Master wouldn't want tears. Such emotion is a weakness, a breach in our balance. We must be tranquil, but not expressive. Transcendent by keeping ourselves from being so rooted in the passions of our body and mind."

Daitya shook her head. He gestured toward the body and the boat as long purple clouds stretched overhead. "This is one of ours. One of our tribe. Have you noticed lately how weak our ranks are? This tribal return to the lands of our spirit has been good in the short-term, but do you see more warriors or sages being born outside of rumor and legend? No, Ko-Zin, I never met your Master, and from what I hear of him, I'm certainly glad I didn't. But he was one of ours, a brother in spirit and blood and soul, and I reserve the right to cry over him if I choose."

"No!" Ko-Zin yelled, and felt an awful shame fall over him even as he allowed his voice to rise. He said it again, but more quietly

this time: "No. You do not. We must not offend him by losing our serenity. Not here. Not in these last moments I have with him."

He was surprised by her reaction. She was always a spirited one, but he didn't expect her to scoop a handful of moist dirt from the shore and throw it in his face. She snarled. "You've truly earned your name, packmate. Quiet Repose? A terribly *accurate* name."

And then she stalked away. Rivulets of muddy muck dribbled down his cheek. But there were no tears. He wouldn't allow them.

• • •

An arrow, crudely fashioned, sailed for his eye. On its crooked broad-head tip was a lacquering of silver. He felt it coming. He invited it to pierce his mind so that he may perish.

But then, for but a moment, time did not work as it was meant to, and everything seemed distant and still. Ko-Zin felt his heart leap as a hand fell upon his shoulder, and he knew that somehow the enemy had tricked him and now they were flanking him, making his death less honorable by murdering him from behind. But then he smelled her breath, a drifting scent of jasmine and blood, and he turned to see Daitya, standing there still wrapped in her white cloth cocoon. She curled her hand around the back of his head and bent his face down to meet hers, and she pressed a kiss through the fabric upon his lupine brow, and he heard her laugh a chiming sound.

Then she explained to him, "Your ancestors got together for a little meeting, and do you know what they decided? They concluded that it wasn't yet your time, Ko-Zin. I agree. Your time for quiet repose is over. It is time for anger, but not yet time for defeat. Take hold of it, for you are not to die like this. And don't forget to laugh, my love."

He wanted to shake his head and take a claw and split the cloth that ran from her feet to the top of her head and pull her back out because she was alive! But then she was gone, a vapor in a quick wind, and he was back to where he was, and before he knew what he turned his body to the side and swatted out with a massive hand. The silver-tipped arrow batted to the ground, breaking in two.

Ko-zin stared at the broken shaft for a few seconds as more gunshots ricocheted off the rocks nearby. *I was going to let that arrow kill me*, he thought. It seemed an alien thought, distant and far away. He turned back to see Daitya's body, wrapped and unmoving, in the center of the Tower of Silence. The vultures inched closer. That was what she wanted. Anything for her, he decided. Today, it seemed, was not a good day to die.

• • •

Once in a rare while, Ko-Zin did not see into his past. Instead, he saw glimpses of his future. When these fleeting visions happened, he mostly dismissed them. He was not yet an ancestor himself. Things were in the past. The future was not yet here.

But sometimes, there was a glimmer of doubt. Time, he was told, was really a great circle drawing forever back upon itself, so why couldn't he see forward? In fact, weren't terms like *forward* and *backward* devoid of meaning when used in relation to the nature of time? Perhaps he was an ancestor. Perhaps this life that he was living was only a memory caught in the mind of a future incarnation, and he was maybe little more than a phantasm in a deluded rice-wine dream. In those times he felt both very alive and very empty, and he quietly questioned whether at some point he died and just never knew it.

In the future, he saw himself as an American adolescent who had experienced the First Change at a young age. He was not Chinese, not Indian, and his skin was as pale as a plate of milk. It felt foreign and outlandish, but at the same time, wearing this skin was only a disguise. The soul inside was his, and not his. He could feel himself in there, his identity commingling with a hundred other ancestors.

Sometimes he saw what his future self was going to do (or, he reminded himself, *had already done*). He knew that his forthcoming incarnation would be a Full Moon, his heart full of the love of war and battle. The young man was already an apprentice of the Zephyr camp, learning the ways of the bo staff and the quick-yet-graceful fluidity of Kailindo. Things that Ko-Zin himself had never learned. And the boy was hotheaded and impulsive. A painfully curious teenager with stubborn devotion to whatever fool-headed crusade he decided upon at that moment. Ko-Zin watched as the boy fawned after a pretty Thai girl walking down the sidewalk of some filthy Western city. He glimpsed the young Stargazer getting teary-eyed at a movie on television! He also saw in dreams as the boy went after the enemies, those stinking of the Wyrm, with an impetuousness that precluded everything that Ko-Zin held dear. This incarnation of his was agile and able when it came to battle — his physical form had an unforeseen steadiness. But his mind had great imbalance. He wanted! He coveted! He cried and yelled and laughed.

When he saw those things in his mind's eye, Ko-Zin wanted to die. He felt horrid shame at his future self. He wanted to reach across the boundaries of both time and space and grab hold of the boy and throttle him until he had learned a modicum of wisdom. Or better yet, if only he could step into the future and bring with him the bamboo rod of his master, and teach the boy a long and painful lesson. Those were the things Ko-Zin felt.

But now, all of that had changed. Questions about everything he had done up until this point chewed at his mind like a nest of rats. And it made him question that boy, that juvenile Stargazer he would become when he finally died. He suddenly didn't hate that boy anymore, because once upon a time, he was that boy. Master hadn't taught him wrongly, but he also hadn't taught him properly, either. Things were forever more complex than a simple black-and-white balancing. Life was not played out on the plates of a scale. The mysteries of living and dying were profoundly deeper than that, and Ko-Zin embraced this enigma like a consuming fire.

• • •

He was a tempest incarnate. A tormenting wind of razor and blade.

He had leapt down off of the Tower of Silence, dropping like a stone until the last moment, when he allowed his command of the winds to soften his landing, and he dropped to the cracked ground in a crouch, both blades singing in his hands. The masses descended upon him, but he was not patient, he did not wait for them. He in turn cut through them, pirouetting with his *wakazashi*, blood and black humours gouting up over him. The massive jaws of his war form snapped closed on arms and collarbones, breaking them like balsa wood beneath boot-heels. He howled, reveling in the baptism of violence even as a rusted machete found purchase in his shoulder or as tainted hands pulled bloody tufts of fur away from his skin. The pain only heightened it all – it wasn't long before the blades fell away from his hand, clattering to the earth as something boiled inside of him. He let it loose for the first time in a long time, unlocking the red door inside his heart and throwing the key into darkness. It poured out of him, rage clawing through his veins just as surely as he clawed through his attackers. Distantly there was a shot and he felt warm blood — his own blood — spatter his face, but it felt like nothing more than an miniscule bee biting his hide and it encouraged him further. Their flesh and bones were clay in his expert hands. Falling away in great clumps. Limbs lost. Death found.

After all of it, he found the crimson cloud falling away from his vision, and he realized that he was lying on his back, the rough and rocky ground digging into his scoured back. His left arm hung limp, a deep furrow dug out of the shoulder, the edges of the wound still burning with the ever-present memory of silver. All around him, the bodies of the dead, or the few forms of the fleeing running into the distance. Every part of his body screamed with pain. One eye was swollen closed. A few teeth lay broken upon his tongue.

He tried to stand. And failed. He collapsed back to the ground, the shock running more pain through his body. The claws on his toes curled in frustration, and he tried again, this time groaning and howling until finally he managed to get to his feet. Blood ran off of him in little streams, pooling at his feet. Night officially was around him. Luna dangled like a thin wisp in the sky, surrounded by her shawl of stars.

Daitya was right. The time for quiet repose was over, wasn't it? He pictured her again, standing behind him like a tangible ghost, and he missed that. But he would do her no justice by dying, would he? It would only punish her, serving himself up to the world that way. He would go out with honor and wisdom, not cowardice.

All those years, he thought, *that I spent in peaceful meditation. For what?* There was some use to it, of course. The ability to center yourself. To not lose your identity and soul to the active pull of anger, to maintain some semblance of temperance and humility. But this was a time of war, it was not an age of peace. In his head he could practically hear the cosmic wheels turning as the great Apocalypse sloughed ever closer. The Way was a path of inaction, stillness, of becoming part of the stream instead of an object that diverts it. That was the proper way, the peaceful way, but it would do nothing in this age, Ko-zin now understood. The stream was poisoned. Its waters were black. It would do no good to become part of this stream, to let it simply pass around him and destroy everything in its wake. It was time to become an obstacle in those waters. It was a time for war. He would most likely die taking this path — and his death would be cruel, terrible, beyond painful. But it would be the proper path.

Quietly, Ko-zin stepped over the carnage he had wrought and collected his two weapons from the field of slaughter. He wiped the weapons clean on his fur, careful to avoid his wounds. Soon he would have to find some source of pure water and wash all of his cuts and gashes, for in them he could already feel the slick stinging taint of the Wyrm biting deep into his blood. But that was for later. Now, he merely stood staring up at the stars, offering them a whispered prayer of solace, forgiveness and steadfastness in this time of nightmare. In his mind he heard them answer, a chattering of small bells pealing words of strength.

He offered one more prayer to his fallen packmates, and also he uttered a promise that their deaths would not be in vain.

Then, framed by the night sky, fur matted with red, Ko-zin did as Daitya had requested. He laughed. For now he was Ko-zin of the Tempest Winds.

STARGAZERS™

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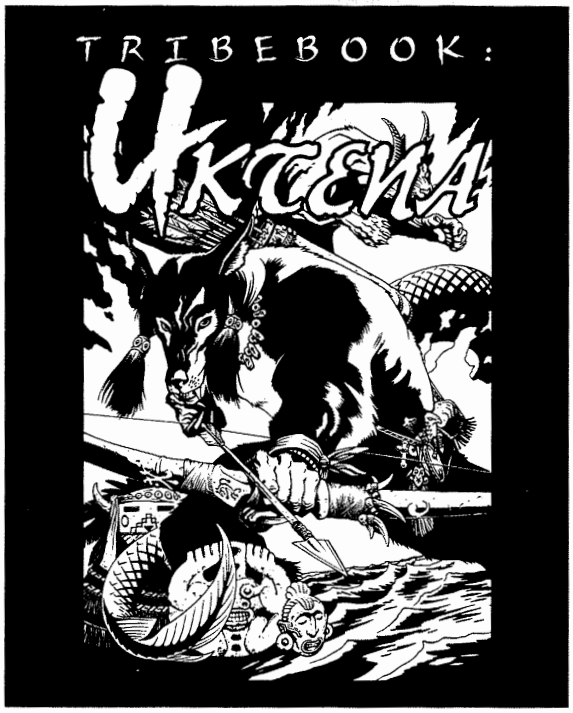

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BRIDGES 03

Chapter One: The Long River of Stars

"Arise! Awake! Approach the great and learn. Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path, so the wise say — hard to tread and difficult to cross."

— Upanishads 3:14

Council of spirits hale and old, I come to you with a great entreaty. I ask to be allowed time before you, to speak of my tribe. We are in the midst of dying, you see. Our lungs rattle, we make desperate gasps for air. Our heartbeat, however, is not sluggish; it hastens, beating faster and faster until it expires in a rush of blood. I can smell it. I can taste it. The end is close. The end of us, perhaps. Perhaps the end of all things. The weave and weft of the world moves forever in a circle, doubling back upon itself, the serpent biting its own tail as the ages and epochs forever turn. But what if the cycle were broken? What if the serpent was made to unhinge his jaws and release his tail? Perhaps we are the first sign of this, the first sand to drop from the highest bell of the cosmic hourglass. Maybe we will be the first tribe to fall.

I come bearing the voices, songs, whispers, and prayers of many. Some are from members of my tribe who are out in the world, living their lives as they best see fit. Some are from members of my tribe who have are dead and lost in the circling history, but have been given a new mouthpiece through me. Others do not belong in our tribe, but have wisdom to share — after all, sometimes an outsider has a truer perception than one standing on the inside. All will share different things: stories, ideas, dreams and curses. You will hear the history of us, and the length and breadth of our very purpose. There is nothing that says these voices must agree. This is not a presentation of uniformity, only of the higher ideal of Truth as it can be expressed. As for me, I am only the threshold for these tales, an instrument playing countless songs. One small voice among thousands, like a single star in the sky.

Our stories have often been told in the Jade Record, but it has long been inaccurate. I come to you now, pleading you to listen to the words of our tribe and allow them entrance into the eternal chronicle of our people.

Is this a dirge for my people? A threnody crooned by a dying, old man? I might be delivering evidence of our ineluctable demise, showing you little more than the epitaph that deserves to be carved for us in the Jade Record itself. But could it be more than that? Something altogether different? Might it be evidence that there is some small ember of life burning deep within us? I'm not the one to decide. I am merely the tailor, sewing together a cloak of stars and sadness. What becomes of it is for you to decide, spirits. Whatever you make of it, this is the record of my tribe, the Stargazers.

The First Stargazer

The first story will be told in no one's voice but my own. It is from a different time, and I do not trust this story to strangers, especially those not of our tribe. It is not the first story in chronology, but to us, it is still the most important! Listen to me now as I speak of the first Stargazer:

I am Li Tie-guai, or Li of the Iron Crutch. I am called this because my right foot is shriveled and turned inward,

and my calf muscle is small and weak. And so in my forms where I walk upon two legs, I use a heavy crutch made of iron. I am a very old man who has seen many times and many places. Soon I die, but even in the throes of death I will be able to smile when thinking of the following story. Oh, you might think a story like this should come from the mouth of a laughing No-Moon, but I promise you — it is true! I will tell you this tale, and you will see how intrinsically we are tied to the very creation of the universe.

I will tell you more about the Jade Emperor later, but trust now that he was the wise master of the cosmos, and his name was Yu-Huang-Shang-Ti. He had a bride, the beautiful T'ai-Shen. T'ai-Shen was the creator of the world, the beautiful spirit that lent life to the ground and molded all living things from the magical clay of the earth. The two of them sat in Heaven on their respective thrones, watching the world grow and change between the triangular forces of Passion, Reality, and Darkness. The Jade Emperor, however, held great rivalries with the King of Darkness, a great shadowy snake known as Kung-Kung. Kung-Kung was never satisfied with his role; he always wanted more. The thrones of Heaven looked very tasty to the King of Darkness, and he knew that if he was able to usurp the Jade Emperor's rule, he could have true control over the world instead of always being locked in struggle with the other two forces of Passion and Reality. But Darkness was not meant to rule — Darkness is imbalanced and too hungry. The Jade Emperor knew that Kung-Kung's domain was that of suffering and blood. While the world needs its dose of those two dark elements, should Kung-Kung be allowed to steal the dual thrones of Heaven, then the world would drown in terrible pain — and that could not be permitted. And so, the Emperor and the King were constantly warring with one another.

The rulers of Heaven had a wolf that was called Pan Gu. The wolf was a simple beast of piebald gray. He was humble and without a cruel nature, and he also had a deeply clever mind (after all, Pan Gu was a beast of Heaven, and was given a greater dose of wit and intelligence than other animals). Once day, Kung-Kung made a failed attempt on T'ai-Shen's life, and the Jade Emperor decided that no more of the snake's machinations would be tolerated. He issued a promise to the denizens of Heaven: "Whosoever brings me the head of the great serpent Kung-Kung will be allowed to wed my wife, the beautiful creator, T'ai-Shen!" But all were afraid of the dark serpent, and no one offered their aid in regards to cutting off and thieving Kung-Kung's dragon head. But the wolf overheard, and that night while the Jade Emperor and T'ai Shen were asleep, Pan Gu left the palace and traveled through the many worlds and many stars until he reached the deep, subterranean palace of Kung-Kung, the King of Darkness.

The wolf went to Kung-Kung and lay down by the serpent's side, and Kung-Kung was amused and swelled with pride. The King of Darkness announced to the spirit world, "Ah-ha! The Jade Emperor weakens, for his lowliest pet has come to join me by my side! Soon I will have the thrones of Heaven!" And so the dark serpent declared that he would throw a great banquet in honor of his ascendancy to the throne, an unprecedented feast filled with grisly revelry and grotesque delights. All of the worst spirits were invited. Creatures of lies, anguish, gluttony, and lust were allowed to attend, and they all gorged on their grim meals alongside Kung-Kung.

But Kung-Kung's hungers ruled him; his darkness was forever driven by his manifold appetites, and that night he fell into a deep slumber as his serpentine body processed all that he had consumed. After all the spirits had left, and while the King of Darkness was caught in the throes of bottomless sleep, Pan Gu sneaked into the serpent's chambers and gnawed off the beast's head! After that the wolf dragged the head back through the many worlds, up the steps of Heaven, and into the throne room of the Jade Emperor and T'ai-Shen.

Yu-Huang-Shang-Ti was astonished. Was it truly possible that this simple animal — his own faithful wolf — had mastered the cunning and ingenuity to sneak into the underground chambers of Darkness and bite off Kung-Kung's gigantic head? It must be, he decided, and from there he knew that he was looking upon the most wise and loyal creature that his bride, T'ai-Shen, had ever molded from the substance of the world.

The Jade Emperor thus decided to offer his own bride to the wolf Pan Gu, but first he knew that it was not natural for the goddess to mate so openly with such a different animal, and so he changed Pan Gu. He wanted the beast to have the body of a man, but still retain the heart and mind of the clever wolf that captured Kung-Kung's head. And so Pan Gu was given the fluidity of forms, able to become both man and animal, transitive and liquid like water and wind. Pan Gu took the form of a man with a wolf's head as the Jade Emperor offered his old servant the hand of his bride, but much to the Emperor's surprise, Pan Gu shook his head!

"I do not deserve such a magnificent bride," Pan Gu said, and instantly the Emperor knew that to be true. But Pan Gu continued: "I wish not to be her *husband*, but instead to be her *protector* because even now I sense that Kung-Kung is growing not just one new head, but many, and I fear that her life and her creations are in danger. All is of T'ai-Shen, and I wish for it to remain that way."

The Jade Emperor turned this over to the goddess T'ai-Shen who created the world, and she was honored with Pan Gu's newly affirmed loyalty. She said that Pan Gu would have power upon the earth to protect her, and that he may live there upon a mountain called by her name, T'ai-Shen. There he would be the first of many such protectors, all of whom would have calm hearts and strong minds that they could use to keep her safe. And so Pan Gu was the first of our kind, the earliest of Stargazers.

It is a silly story, but that is how stories are. It is a tale I believe.

Two Tales of the Dawn

Let us go back a ways, before our origins, to the origins of all things. I have two stories to tell. How can there be two stories, you say? Others believe in one story, not two. We believe in many, but these two are only examples. Truth has a funny way of wearing many faces. Is one face the true face, or yet another mask? The real truth is, it does not matter. I speak now in the voice of ancestor Dai Zheng, the Celestial Minister:

I serve Yu-Huang-Shang-Ti, the August Supreme Emperor of Jade. His court is in the highest level of Heaven, and that is where I reside, now as a spirit monitoring all things. There was once a void. A place of impenetrable nothing, a core of central chaos exemplified by Darkness. On the edges of this void, forces conspired to act. These were the two forces of Passion and Reality. Reality was hollow without Passion, but without Reality, Passion did not have a body. So the two became one like dragons biting each other's tails, and this way they were able to penetrate the Darkness and become one with the void. This was the first act that created the Wheel of Ages.

The Wheel turned first and the Age of Dawning opened its eyes, and with it grew the Master of Ten Thousand Things, Yu-Huang-Shang-Ti. The August Emperor found that this was a time of pure light. Perfection was uniform, and the three forces that created the universe were in ideal accord. Out of this, the August Personage wielded great magic to turn the Wheel of Ages again.

The second age, the Age of the Ten Thousand Things, was ushered in by the act of creating the Emperor's bride, T'ai-Shen. Yu-Huang-Shang-Ti was lonely and demanded one to balance him, and so T'ai-Shen was born, who would create all things from the clay of the world. First she created the spirits from the lowest ranks to the highest ranks, then she molded plants, then sculpted mankind, and after man came the ones with special gifts. The Wan Xian, the *hsien*, the *hengeyokai*. Still the world was in balance. For all things black there were all things white. Nothing existed without a partner, and the Wheel of Ages sat perfectly upon this pinnacle of pinpoint balance. If the Wheel could have been stopped there, the world would not be where it was today, needing protectors to defend it from the gnawing urges pushing it toward oblivion. But the Wheel continued to turn unabated, and the third age, the Age of Legends, blossomed.

It is said that a single act was able to imbalance the world. All things had their equals and their opposites, and this was the way that the Wheel remained balanced. But somehow, one brother was led to murder another. Did a spirit whisper in his ear? Had Darkness decided that it wanted to return to its prominence in the void, or had Reality grown to believe that it was more than the sum of its parts? It doesn't matter. The brother was murdered, and it was a small thing. But small things have a way of becoming big. It was only one small imbalance, one tiny imperfection. But other imperfections began happening. Little things, out of place. The Wheel of Ages shuddered, and began spinning slightly off of its axis. The three forces of all things awoke independently, no longer seeing themselves as part of one harmonious being but instead believing themselves to be separate pieces, each better than the other. A flood of spiders crawled out of the body of Reality and began to spin webs over all things in an effort to trap them. The fiery heart of Passion lashed out with tendrils of madness. And from the bowels of darkness crawled the dragon Kung-Kung, whose belly swarmed with worms ready to eat away the axis of the Wheel of Ages so that the universe would once more topple back into the deep and formless void. The Yama Kings were given dominion, ancient demons that branded men's hearts. The August Emperor awakened the powers of men to fight against the demons while Passion sent its lunacy into the blood of the shape-changers. The world shook with war that would never cease.

The Wheel began spinning drastically off-kilter, and this movement birthed the troublesome Age of Testing, when death was more prominent than life. Those of the Changing Blood bit into one another as living death consumed the hearts of the August Emperor's own children. The three forces that once had been one were growing madder by the moment. Each wanted prominence, and balance was a hungry ghost without weight. The worlds began to separate. Heavens, Hells, spirit worlds, all lashed apart and walled away from the world as the hierarchies of spirits were lost in the fight. The roads to virtue were blocked and all beings became darker, their eyes turned from the light.

This darkness of the soul brought this current fifth age, the Age of Shadows. Passion is lost and blind. Reality has bound and gagged the world in the webs of its children. Darkness has coiled itself around the roots of the world. The Wheel of Ages was barely able to spawn this most current age, the Age of Sorrow.

This is the time when the Wheel may stop turning. It sits upon a evanescent foundation, and if that withers, the world will achieve complete imperfection. This is a time of horror. Demons have awakened and resumed their thrones. The karmic debt of all beings is heavy enough to snap them all in half, and the death felt across the world is enough to bring the Wheel crashing down back into nothing. This is what may happen. Where once there was Creation, there will soon be nothing more than Oblivion.

This is an alternate, and somewhat shorter story, from a member of our tribe called Deya Purana. She is a mouthpiece, like I, born under the swollen belly moon. Listen:

Gaia has always been here. In the beginning She was a sound, a single vowel shouted out over a sea of nothingness. This sound was formless and reached across all things, echoing back upon itself a thousandfold until it weaved together the womb that would birth her body. At first, her body was nothing more than wind and water. The sound carried her spirit, and was called the Wyld. The water below

churned with a race of serpent-demons, and the water was called Raksha, the Wyrm. The wind carried the spray of water and the whorls of sound and forced them together to make all things, and so this wind is called the Weaver. The first thing to be created out of this was a mountain called Meru, and from this mountain all creatures, spirits, and gods would crawl. Raksha the Wyrm grew jealous of these other creatures, and began churning the seas even more, attempting to drown these beings (and all of reality) in its milky, venom-slick waters. Gaia was threatened, but she was granted the gift of warriors to stand against the Wyrm's jealousy, and these warriors were beasts who could become men. These beasts attacked Raksha and forced him to vomit up the Seven Precious Things: *Truth, Harmony, Song, Heaven, Peace, Anger,* and most important of all, *Love*. All the Changing Bloods were then made to protect these Seven Precious Things, but one group of them was ceded a very special task. These shapechangers were given the charge not to protect the Seven Precious Things, but to understand them and teach others that which they learn. These shapechangers are the Stargazers.

The Curse of Klaital

Now you will hear from a young man of our tribe. I am holding his voice for you to hear, so hear it now. These are the words of Peter Cleartongue:

There's two stories here. One people think they know, and one people really *do* know but are too afraid to really remember it. You follow me so far? Nobody likes to hear what I have to say, but I have dreams, right? These dreams let me remember far, far back. They say I have a strong ancestral spirit, which bothers people because, hey, I'm an American. Sure, I'm racially Chinese, but I was born in this country and I'm staying in this country. That makes people nervous when I tell them that Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Klaital is probably wrong.

The first story, the one people tell, is simple. A long time ago, there was a time when humans were breeding like rabbits. Their numbers swelled like tumors, and they were untrained like monkeys and began guzzling up Gaia's resources left and right. Chopping down trees, fouling the rivers with their piss and shit, putting the torch or axe to anything that got in their way. The stories say that mankind was out of control, and you know what? That's probably true. So, how to solve this problem? The correct answer would be to teach them, guide them, shepherd the apes into some kind of enlightenment — but the correct answer is rarely the easy one, and everybody likes an easy answer. In this case, the easy answer was as simple as *Kill them all, let Gaia sort 'em out.*

And so you have the Impergium. The pogrom of man began, and humans were hedged in by tooth and claw, murdered for following their natural instincts. That clever cosmic spider-queen, the Weaver, protected her children as best as possible, madly spinning webs to help man innovate and protect himself, but she was only so much use. Even now, with all the advances that civilization allows, you really think a man versus a werewolf — hell, *ten* men versus one of us — in a cage match, *mano a mano*, is going to end well for the human? It wouldn't now, and it sure as hell didn't then. Men built axes, walls, hid behind covers of leaf and branch to camouflage themselves. But axes couldn't cut through our hide, walls couldn't keep us from coming in, and camouflage didn't mean dick when it came down to the high-precision instrument of a wolf's sniffer, right?

This is the part of the story everybody knows, or thinks they know. There were no tribes at this point, only a loosely amalgamated collection of angry, hairy sonsofbitches, but one of them started thinking differently and saying so to boot. This one's name was Klaital, and he was considered to be one of the wisest, most prudent Garou among them. Klaital was a master — he could discern secrets from the stars and whisper tales from the time before wolves and man when only you spirits held court over the Gaia realm. So this one, this "most wise" of werewolves, spoke up against the killing of man. He held up his hands and pointed out that slaughter only made the humans worse. Treating them like beasts made them think like beasts, and they should be taught, not tortured. The story goes that Klaital came to realize just how dark and hypocritical the spirit of the Garou truly is, and that the werewolves were only ensuring that man would edge closer to their patron saint, the Weaver, which in turn only strengthened the oppression against the poor little Wyrm. And so Klaital wept, sank like a stone into the grim waters of Harano, and left. This, the sages say, is why we walk apart from the other tribes, and why we must remain alone. Blah blah blah.

But let's talk truth, *real* truth, *honest* truth. I'm going to tell you how Klaital fucked us from this moment. You'll probably never hear this story repeated again, unless it comes from my lips. Does that make it untrue? Am I lying? Maybe. But I don't think so. This has come to me in dreams, and I feel its certainty crawling in the marrow of my goddamn bones. The real story diverges when Klaital goes to tell the other assembled Garou to stop, to learn to coexist and enlighten the monkeys instead of culling them like livestock. Picture it: Klaital is standing before the throngs of wolfmen, seething beasts who stand rapt as the wise elder speaks to them of *balance* and *compassion* and other big, cozy words. As he's there, orating in his simple way, a single stone sails from the treeline. Not a big stone. No bigger than a man's fist, anyway. And it hits our beloved Klaital square in the back of his head. *Whack!* His words are interrupted, and a collective, growling murmur travels across the assembled beast-men like ripples in an angry pond.

Then the monkeys attack. A small cluster of them, no more than two dozen, foolishly decided that they could be a match for the creatures of the night that came and drew claws across the throats of their children. They have new toys given by the Weaver, and thinking that they have the upper hand, they rush the scene. Here you think, *Oh, this is*

where the wolves attack and slaughter the uppity humans and Klaital tries to stop them but they can't hear his sensible words of peace through the sounds of gory butchery? Right?

Wrong. Klaital didn't speak out against the violence. No, Klaital *led* the charge, his rage burrowing out of his heart and exploding into his blood. His was the first claw to rake flesh from bone, the first jaw to snap closed on the brittle skull of a retreating man. He tasted blood, felt it wash over him like a healing tide, and the other Garou joined in. They slaughtered the impudent apes like so much cattle. It was quick, easy, and afterward Klaital's fur was spattered with gore.

How's that for balance? Does enlightenment usually come at the end of a ripping claw? Here our estimable, most-venerable elder preaches a message of tolerance, and has to take a five-minute break to slaughter some innocents. Didn't exactly do much to help his case. The shame he felt was like a great anchor tied to his heart. His soul shrank at the very smell of death that hung about him, and he went to bathe himself in the river. Once he was clean, he left the others. He simply stalked off in the other direction, determined to never return to the fold. Not because of his shame in them, but because of his shame in himself. The indignity of what he had done set him apart from the others, he decided. It was too easy to watch the balance he so carefully strived for go spiraling off into a red, red rage. And so Klaital settled on the fact that he should forever be apart from the world, and he became near-obsessed with mastering his inner fire. He chose to keep his rage contained, capped, lidded, sealed up within him. That way, such a grave mistake could never happen again.

Sound like anyone? Sound like, oh, any Stargazer you know? Sounds like a *lot* of them, to me. Klaital screwed us all. His action — and his *shame* of that action — still sings a sad song in our blood, and it dishonors us to this very day. We dig deep holes inside of us and bury our anger, and in the process we walk far apart from the other Garou. Is this a good thing? Some say yes, some say no. I myself don't know and am not one wise enough to decide. Maybe this is the road we're meant to walk down, or maybe we just think that and it's actually a road that leads to nowhere. What I do know is, the story I know about Klaital isn't the one they tell in Stargazer School.

A postscript to the tale deserves to be told. As a tribe, we're obsessed with balance, peace, keeping our rage tethered inside so we don't break out of the cycle. I was in Shanghai last year, in the Shandong province, seeking to learn some itty-bitty secrets of our tribe from a *Tengu* junk dealer, but he was out buying cigarettes, so I stopped off to pray at a local temple. Another of our tribe was there; I won't tell you his name. He seemed wise, and he was a No Moon like myself, so I decided to test the waters and tell him my little secret about Klaital. He took it very well. And by "well" I mean that he bit a meaty chunk out of my shoulder, raked a foot-long gash that let my rib-bones breathe fresh air, and then threw me off the roof of the temple where I fell five stories. Then he disappeared into the night. How's that for balance? Ah, Klaital, your curse lives on.

War of Shame

Waters-Swiftly-Still was a balancer, a Half Moon who lived during that time some call the War of Rage, others call the War of Shame. His spirit lives on as our ancestor, speaking to us during our quiet times. He tells us now of the time in which he lived:

Let me speak of balance. It is my gift.

Balance, we once said, comes from the perfection of wisdom. And how does one obtain a perfection of wisdom? By abstaining, we said. One who is on the path of balance, who walks the thinnest string across a vast and empty gorge, must not act rashly or he will fall into death. Abstinence must be adhered to in regards to all things on this world and in our souls. Abstain from killing. Abstain from acts of lust. Abstain from acts of greed. Abstain from the emotions of enjoyment and sadness and anger for these things are sure to push you from your path of walking the tight string.

During my time, our tribe was few in number, much as it is now. We did not breed like the others. There came a time when the Garou decided that they were the greatest of the Changing Blood, that they could demand servitude from the spirits and the other shapechangers. The catmen held secret wisdom away from the world and the ratmen buried arcane relics deep within the bowels of their nesting warrens. Foxmen knew the answers to many riddles and the bearmen held communicated covertly with Gaia herself. The Garou grew jealous. These gifts should rightly be theirs, it was decided, and so they made motion to take the gifts from the others. At first they asked, and were met with disdain. The next option was to take their wants by force. Much blood was spilled. Whole races of the Changing Blood were forever lost, never to be renewed on the great Wheel of Ages. The boars, bats, bulls, all wiped cleanly from the mortal plane, never to re-emerge. The fields of battle were soaked with death.

We, the Stargazers, held back. We abstained from judgment. The only perfect choice, we decided, was the path of inaction. The path of inaction was fraught with no danger. There were no worries of falling off our precarious string. Of course, we gave counsel. We encouraged other Garou, even other of the Changing Blood, to attempt to find the perfection of wisdom and balance that we sought so desperately. Some listened. Most did not.

One of our tribe, Kiru of the Five-Color Star, did not agree with our policy of restraint. She went to our eldest members and tried to sway them to intervene, to stand against our more brutal brothers. She had been out in the forest, she said, and had found a great slaughter of Okuma, the children of the Bear. It seemed, she said, that they hadn't even fought back, that they had only been rounded up and gutted like fish on the forest floor. There was dried blood on her hands, rusty and red. The elders denied her. She went to

me, and asked for me to deny our limitations and quash our fear to help her protect the Changing Bloods who were tyrannized by our Garou neighbors. I told her no, and she said that she would go at it alone.

She left us. Went away, alone, into the dark night. I knew I would be unable to forgive myself if I did not attempt to stop her, for she was teetering on the brink of final imbalance. She needed to be pulled back from the edge to resume the minimal path. Kiru was my sister, we were from the same litter, and I would not let this happen to her. I went after her.

She was elusive like a sea snake; as soon as I thought I had a trail leading me to her, she wriggled away and the hunt was thrown off course. At one point, I had lost her scent for many days, and I was certain that I would not be able to find her. The spirits already whispered that she had run secret attacks on the other Garou, that she had fouled their drinking water and stolen their martial weapons to throw into the deepest pits and lakes. But then, by the temple at Amidaji, I heard tell that there was a great battle raging not far, on the fields of Dan-no-ura. Kiru would be there, I knew, and so I went.

But I was too late. The battle had come and passed like a quickly burning fire, and now the once-emerald field was spattered with red. Bodies lay everywhere; almost all Okuma, their massive bodies hulking like dirt piles, cooling with the setting sun. Flies ran thick in the sky and carpeted corpses. Through the rancid scent of death, I caught a familiar hint, and my nose told me that Kiru was here. I smelled the flowers she kept in her hair and the oils she washed with. I also smelled her blood.

She was lying across the warform of another Garou, whose throat had been opened by a ragged tear of claw or teeth — Kiru's claws or teeth, I surmised. Her own belly had been ripped open, the guts spread around her in a pile.

Spirits attended to her. Butterflies tasting her tears, whispering ghosts dabbing at her brow with leaves. She was dying, and I knelt by her and told her that I could carry her to the temple, and there we would heal her and talk of her indiscretions. Kiru only smiled at me, her teeth smeared with crimson, and she laughed a weak laugh.

"Muso," she said (for that was once my name), "it was not my indiscretion that killed me, it was yours." I told her I didn't understand, that she chose the path of excess and in turn had placed herself far out of balance. Again she laughed.

"Balance is not this thing," she said, and I did not believe her. Her bruised lips worked, telling me this: "Balance is finding equal measure of all things. On a scale, if you place four stones on one plate and four stones on the other, then you have seen balance. There are two sides of the scale for us, my brother. There is *action*, and then there is *inaction*. You have placed all of your stones on one side of the scale. I have chosen to distribute equally between. I understand moderation and restraint, but I also understand that when the world calls me to battle, I will be there. Your scale is tilted toward one side, and one side only. Who is better balanced then, you, or I?"

She laughed again, and I told her that I did not believe her, but that didn't matter. I tried to pick her up and take her to the temple, but she coughed up a terrible knot of blood and humours onto my shoulder... and then her eyes went dead and her soul passed. I looked at the scene one last time to see the butchery that had prevailed here, and in my mind I was able to tell myself that Kiru was wrong, that her choice was truly the path of imbalance. I went home, stone-faced, never to think of Kiru again.

It was not long before I fell into the sadness that assails the spirit, and it did not matter if I chose action or inaction, because I was incapable of truly understanding either. I only knew grayness, a bleak pit inside of me that I never understood. I passed on this way, dozens of years later. I never left it, never recovered. The War of Shame was a terrible time for all of us, you see, and each of us held onto our own kernel of disgrace and shame. Our greatest shame as a tribe was that we never did anything to stand in the way of true imbalance, and my own greatest shame is that I never aided the only one who truly tried. Such is the passing of time, when all records of our indignities are made clear for us only when it has become too late.

The Heavenly Accords

Some tales of our tribe are less myth and more history. But still these moments of the past lie mostly hidden from us. We were not alive then, and though some kept written records, these records have either been destroyed over time or were so well hidden (a testament to the concealer) that they have yet to be found. But our tribe holds a better connection to our past selves than other tribes do. They think of their ancestors as separate and dead. But ours still live like wind inside of us, and in fact, are us in truth. One of our kind knows this very well. He is Manjushri the Noble and Gentle, and in his voice are a thousand voices. Take note, spirits:

I'm the mother and father of many. And I'm the child of many more. You are spirits, but your memory is transient. Mine's eternal. There have been a thousand Manjushris over ten thousand years, each one with a different name and different mind but the exact same heart. That heart still beats on inside of me, and it has seen a vast swath of history. I can tell you much of the history that's been lost to us. My sword of wisdom may be able to pare down your ignorance to a manageable portion.

During the early times, mankind began fumbling its way into this thing called "civilization." They began to build buildings higher than their own heads, erect statues of their reverent leaders, and stare up at the sky while pondering some small part of "what it all really meant." Our kind, and by that I do not mean Stargazers but all of the Garou, attempted to cull the clans of men first, and later the races of the Changing Blood. Both attempts blessedly failed, but we (and now I *do* mean our tribe) were left with great scars

after. Our souls were tattered, torn, like moth-eaten cloth. We had left the other Garou and opted to travel alone, seeing our path as a "higher one." Many who still remember this choice use it today as one of the reasons we left the Garou Nation as it stands in this modern age. After all, if we did it before, can't we do it again? (Though, as you'll learn, spirits... history has an odd way of circling back on itself.)

Because we had left the other wolfmen, and because of our egregious errors with both man and the other Changing Bloods, many of us desired to make reparations. We offended men first, and they needed our help most of all. One of my ancestors knew a Stargazer called Rahula, and Rahula declared that he would become the "Guardian of Novices." Men and women were the most novice of them all, and Rahula went among the cities of men to teach the sheep a means of shepherding themselves. Rahula became as an advisor, and when he was not busy counseling at the side of a throne, he was teaching others of our kind to do the same. Soon, much of the Stargazer tribe was walking upon the streets of men, enlightening them as best we knew how. Rahula, by now an old man, drew up the first of the Three Accords of the Tribe of Stars: *The Heavenly Accord of Ignorant Man*. This document and declaration said, simply, that we had much debt to these mortal children of Gaia, and that we would teach them to be strong and to pay proper reverence to their mother. We instructed them how to read the future by the stars, and how to navigate by them, too.

In that time, we encountered much trouble from others appearing to do the same as us. These advisors, however, weren't looking to enlighten and ascend nations, but to bring them low into suffering and debauchery. Soon many kings fell under the sway of ancient demons such as Emma-O, Dagon, or Kaoru-Shinji. We fought them every step of the way.

In time, our debt was paid. The men we guided were out of the darkness and were capable of governing themselves. They could assume our roles, guiding one another. Our hand was no longer needed. And so we went to our second debt, to the Changing Bloods.

Uma Maheshvara, another of our tribe, recognized our need to salve the burning second debt, and she took up the cause. She led a small band of Stargazer Theurges who called themselves the Charters of Secret Roads. They studied the nature of Dragon Lines, seeking to harness the unspoken truths intrinsic in this vast network of energy lines. From there, they sought new doorways into the Mirror Lands of the Umbra, and they also located forgotten hearts of power in Gaia's flesh that still pulsed with some puissance. They went deep into the darkness of the universe, crawled through underworlds and soared through heavens. Once they discovered these clandestine in-roads and sacred locations, they turned over all the information to the various courts of the hengeyokai, who were still reeling from their losses in the War of Shame. Uma then demanded that all Stargazers do as she and her followers had done. The others needed strength, and the Stargazers would give it to them as a favor for our one-time indifference. Hence the second of the Accords was drawn up, the *Heavenly Accord of the Gift of the Celestial Mysteries*.

By this point, we had broken almost completely away from all other Garou. We were so involved with either the ways of man or the paths of the other Changing Bloods that the Garou suspected we had up and died, paying homage to the tenet of the Litany that states one shall not suffer their tribe in sickness. In perhaps a way, that is what we did. And none ever expected to come back around and mix ways once again with the other Garou... but that is exactly what happened.

A great evil rose up out of the sands and mountains of the desert in and around the place now identified as the Middle East. There is no one truth as to what happened. Some say an ancient casket was reopened and rancorous spirits escaped, and others mutter that great demons were not satisfied with their slice of the world and so strived to steal more. Whatever the truth is, the blackened fingerprints of the Wyrm were smeared across everything. Across every burning village, every massacre, every cannibal act. All of the Corrupter's names were spoken: Kung-Kung, the Centipede, the Betrayer, Shaitan, the Yomi. And all of his tools were used, as well. The flesh-eating *bakemono* crawled the earth like the walking dead, poisonous red rain ate at the skin of mortals, *kin-jin* vampires left their deep pit caves at night and scented for blood. Great monsters swelled with the Wyrm's breath.

Our Garou brethren, led by the Silent Strider tribe, fought this black tide at every turn. Much Garou blood soaked the rocky sand north above the fertile valley, and slowly but surely the Striders were cut away in little slivers, numbers dangerously dwindling. Murukan, the Red One, a warrior of our tribe who was graced with the power of foretelling (as many of us are), had a vision one night while loping as a wolf upon the banks of the Ganges River, and he saw that a tumor had grown swollen and distended, and if it were allowed more power, there was nothing it would not consume. Balance was broken. Gaia would be eaten, too, our Emerald Mother chewed to ribbons.

Murukan lead a quick charge in crafting and employing the third accord: *The Heavenly Accord of the Emerging Guardian Kings*. This accord demanded that all Stargazers would first call together their allies (both within the courts of man and within the courts of the Changing Bloods), and second would bring them all to the battlefields to choke the life out of the Wyrm's sudden power. It was our duty, Murukan said. He described our tribe as an empty vessel, devoid of autonomy or individual thought. Murukan explained that we were like empty scales, perfectly balanced, and it was our job to enforce this balance in the world. The only thing to fill us up with was the windy breath of responsibility and obligation, and that's what this was. Obligation.

We went. We took our allies into battle. The armies of men clashed against the hideous *bakemono*. The Corax picked at the eyes of the enemy while the spider-changers and ratmen pulled the beasts into secret traps. The Khan and the Nagah fought like fiends, side-by-side with us – and more importantly, with the other Garou. Over many years, after much death was spun back onto the Cycle of Being as life, we achieved victory, however temporary, over the trickery and perversions of the Corrupter. And we expected that we had been reunited with the Garou Nation, perhaps permanently. I can see now that we were wrong.

The War of Great Imbalance

Centuries came and went. Our tribe members were left to deal with the world as they saw fit. The other tribes held fast to single courses, navigating squarely in one direction or another. We did not. Some Stargazers remained among the kingdoms of men, influencing the dynasties, baronies, *caliphas* of the mortal world. Others embroiled themselves in Garou politics, or taught the other Garou some (though never all) of our undisclosed divinations. Some traveled in packs, though most adhered to our mentor-and-student approach. Nothing was constant; all things were changing. But we always endeavored to create balance and harmony, for it was our way.

We sat beneath the trees and taught future *bodhisattvas* the nature of equilibrium. We stood in the shadows as the sage called Jeshua ben Yosef was born in the desert. We protected Beijing, the City of God, from hungry spirits and demons tamed by mad magicians. We allowed plagues to sink their teeth in the world, because at first they were merely agents of the Cycle of Being, for death and dying needed to forever be a natural part of the world. We watched as these sicknesses were leashed by the Eater-of-Souls and Beast-of-War for their own grisly purposes. We walked among the pilgrims of Mohammed, plying their ears with the talk of a steady soul. Many of the records of man and Garou show that we were absent from the world. This is not true. We were never absent. But we were silent.

But our silent ways would come to a close in the late thirteenth century. Few outside of us realize even now the sharp division that rose between the members of our tribe. Was it a civil war? It could be called that, yes, for our ideological differences were so vast that it caused us to battle one another. Our balance toppled like a toothpick house as we spilled the blood of other Stargazers, not the blood of the Corrupter as we should've.

First, out of the plateaus and steppes of Mongolia rose a nomadic people untouched by the rest of the world, as they had been blocked from the influence of all other civilizations. These people had specialized ways of life that suited only them; they remained illiterate and technologically limited, but they were strong thinkers, strategists, and most

importantly, survivors. We had many kin among them, and scattered within were packs of Stargazers.

From the Silk Road, men came with bad natures. They brought plague. They had inventions that boggled the mind of the nomads and made their hearts hurt. And then, the Stargazers and their kin began having dreams. These dreams showed a new enemy — or in their minds, the "true" enemy. It was not the Wyrm. The Corrupter was once an agent of balance, and had been tricked and trapped by the devious Spider Queen, who had gone mad. Her lunacy made her dangerous, and thus she had to be destroyed.

When the Mongols found themselves being marshaled to action by the brilliant warlord Chinghis Khan, they did not know that Stargazers walked behind the action. The Mongols swept the world like a fire. The parapets of Eastern Europe, and the battlements of Islam took the first hits. Many died. The Mongols were brutal; when they were unable to surmount the forces, at night the Stargazers came in swift-moving clutches, slashing at the resources and leaders of the enemy until their ranks were sufficiently thinned. All in the name of destroying that which belonged to Her, the Weaver.

As they did this, another group of our kind rose out of the Middle Kingdom, out of China and Japan. It was a group of Stargazers who favored the quiet, contemplative path. Poets, prophets, and philosophers all. They chose a serene life of inaction. It was believed that the only way that waters remained placid was if they remained undisturbed. Their position was to never disturb the world, but only to watch and offer guidance, enlightenment, and truth. They spread out in pairs (again the mentor-student alliance) to preach this way among the other Stargazers, Garou, and Changing Bloods.

The final third of our tribe was split amongst those who were most like the other Garou. These were Stargazers who felt that duty was most important above all other things. Duty to Gaia, to one another, to mortal man. They traveled in packs, rarely settling in one place but always attempting to affect the world wherever they went. They fought side-by-side with other Garou, seeking to impart temperance and balance before leaving once again. Their great enemy remained the Wyrm and his demons. There was no worse fiend than the Corrupter.

Needless to say, these three factions could not — or would not — agree. Those who favored inaction went among the other dutiful Stargazers to plead their case, but were ignored. Then they went to the Mongol packs to beg the cause of inaction, and their heads were sent back East... separate from their bodies. Meanwhile, the Mongol Garou and the dutiful Stargazers clashed again and again, cutting each other's throats at every turn, each side attempting to enforce their own concept of "balance" and each fighting their own particular "enemy." The dutiful claimed that the Mongols had given into the Wyrm, and the Mongols said that the dutiful had been forever bound by the sickening silk of the Weaver. No middle ground could be found.

The Mongols shifted and changed over the course of the following centuries (even going so far as to using advanced Chinese technology, clearly the Weaver's tools), but the Stargazers who favored wrecking the Weaver's webs merely went on into other cultures and other places. They can still be found today. The dutiful Stargazers dwindled in number, unable to be fully accepted by any one group, finding no recompense (and only death) for their favors to the world. They remain low in number today, but never absent. And the Stargazers who favor inaction swelled in number. More and more of our tribe found that retaining balance in the boat meant never standing up. Sitting in the center, quiet and still, would keep the vessel afloat. Many still exist today, though many died at Shigalu.

The division still exists, the War of Imbalance rages on, and our tribe has never been the same from this separation. Some scholars and prophets within our tribe believe some day we will be reconciled and will all come together under a common banner, though I myself fear that the "common banner" will be nothing more than our total demise.

The Na-Dene Stargazers

Peter Wu is a learned, scientific member of our tribe who may appear not to be with us at all upon first glance. Peter has embraced the ways of learning and study that the Weaver has made available to us all. He does much work on the origins, history, and future of the Stargazers, and as such, a discussion of our tribe would be sorely lacking without his input, would it not? We are proud to have him as one of our blood. Here are his findings:

I'm a little bit scientist, a little bit historian. I consult the spirits or stars just as often as I consult books, fossils, or DNA findings. But in this instance, I was surprised to learn something that even the deep spirits didn't know. Let's talk about the New World.

Well, first, let's go back even before that. Five thousand or so years, to be exact. At that point, herds of early nomadic man took generations to cross the Beringian landbridge (now submerged, obviously), which is how the Americas came to have a native population. These Eurasians, upon coming to the Western continents, were kind enough to paint some images on cave walls for us to find so many millennia later. These images show simple stick figures smudged on the rock, and all around them are large dogs. Or, potentially, wolves. Painted on the periphery of the stick figures, in almost watchful positions were more dogs/wolves, but these beasts stood on two legs. The theories of man posit that these figures represent primordial gods or spirits, or possibly just beasts harrying the tribes. Garou lore, of course, holds that these nomads were more or less shepherded by Garou, and so these beast-headed men represent the Wendigo, Uktena, and Croatan tribes.

What if I told you, though, that I believe some of these Garou were also Stargazers? And that these native Stargazers were alive up until at least the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Listen closely, spirits. Do you hear their whispers out there, somewhere? Do you know who they are? Because I think I do.

I refer back to the notes of one of our own tribe members, an Estonian Stargazer called Karel Kind-Wind. Karel came over to the New World just prior to 1700, helping a small group of ships navigate the ocean, as he was "lucky" with his skills (though it's easy to assume he wasn't lucky, but merely one of our tribe well-learned in star navigation and communication with wind spirits). Karel sailed to what would eventually become the state of New York, and in his many years would travel up and down the coast, helping ships make it safely from Virginia to the French settlements in Canada. Along the way he was able to speak to the spirits of this "new" place and track their secrets. But their secrets sometime puzzled him; in particular, Karel was troubled by strange dreams and cryptic messages from spirits of the north wind. They told him over and over again: "YOUR BLOOD IS HERE AMONG THE LOST." The dreams showed him images of shadowy figures lit by the glyph of our tribe. These messages and whisperings lead Karel, in his later years, to pursue this enigma, which he did up into the deep, snowy heart of Canada.

It took him almost to the end of his life, but he found a group of native tribe members. (Through no help from the other aboriginal Garou, might I add. The Wendigo almost throated him, and the Uktena gave him merciless riddles to solve that were about as useful as a Gordian knot.) Their numbers were small, no more than two dozen. He said they "barely looked like us," citing dusky skin and larger bodies. But he did also mention the pinched epicanthic folds found among Asians, and more importantly, found their ways to be similar to our own. They were not warlike, but more contemplative. Ascetic, essentially, and quite cruel to their own bodies. They carved into their own flesh, meaning for it to scar, and they hung themselves from great wooden hooks in "purification rituals." But they were also very close to one another, very familial. They had with them many kin, apparently, and walked among them as beasts quite freely. Karel called these people the "Yenisei," though I personally call them the "Na-Dene," based on the Sino-Tibetan linguistic roots that Karek hints at in his journals.

Other things we know about the Na-Dene:

Their young went on long rites of passage, deep into the Celestial Umbra, traveling into the far reaches between stars and worlds. Many never returned, and those who had were considered full members of the tribe.

They favored a totem that was, as far as Karel could describe it, a phantom spirit combined of smoke and wind. He was unable to communicate with it, but he did see it in his dreams.

The Na-Dene divided themselves into two sub-groups: The Killer Whale, and the Crow. Karel doesn't say much more on the subject, but believes they used these designations as "teams" for sports, social gatherings, and rituals.

They, like the human tribes of the Tlingit or Eyak, held long "potlatch" ceremonies. (These were great feastings, rituals, and prayers that lasted many days.) Guests (like Karel) were treated as royalty, and were given gifts at the end of the ceremony. Karel himself was given a small doll made of stones and branches.

The men favored silence. No words; only hand-gestures or lip movements, but words held power, it seemed, and were reserved for special times.

And that's where it ends. The Na-Dene disappear with the end of Karel's first journal, and so does Karel Kind-Wind. It's as if they never existed at all. I've delved deep to find further history. I've spoken to some of the oldest trees and longest-blowing winds I could find around the approximate location of these errant tribe members. I've also studied cave paintings, and what did I find? Somehow, the Na-Dene were destroyed. Did they fall by the same manner that wiped out most of their native neighbors? The white settlements encroached upon the aboriginal population, leading to the virtual extinction of many indigenous inhabitants. European Garou were a part of this pogrom as well – could they have murdered the Na-Dene? Or did creatures of the Wyrm surprise them sometime in the night? I don't know. I can only say that the founding of the New World was both a triumph of survival and a tempest of blood-soaked aggression.

Briefly, I'll point back to one of Karel's notes, before he ever met the Na-Dene / Yenisei. He had a dream, and in it, a serpent descended from the stars like a snake lowering itself from a set of tree branches, and it told him that he would meet the lost tribe members, and that someday, they would "guide us all home." I don't know what that means. Our tribe has now officially gone home (and rightly so), but we haven't heard from the Na-Dene ancestors. It puzzles me. Perhaps Karel was having a fever dream. We'll likely never know.

The Widening Chasm

Manjushri's voice comes back to us now as he calls again upon his ancestors to tell more tales of our tribe and their actions. Here we visit China in the late nineteenth century:

The separation of our tribe grew worse as modern times churned forever forward. As time went on, this rift grew between our own members, and also concerning was the rift that slowly separated us from the rest of the Garou Nation. Consider 1839.

One of my ancestors at the time, Tse Hui, was busy promoting peace and accordance between the peoples of China. The rest of the world was moving past the Chinese, accelerating beyond, and the Chinese people were lost in the shuffle. But they remained steadfast to their

cause and began a course of "Self-Strengthening," a movement that swept the people up into a great flurry of production and activity. It was at this time that Tse Hui came to be called "The Vehicle of the Hearers," for he would listen to the problems of his people (Garou, Kin, and otherwise) and set them on the path to enlightenment, hoping to break them free of the tapestry of suffering we are all forever bound to. In this process of strengthening, the Chinese government declared that there would be no more opium imported into the country, for it was corrupting the populace and turning their minds away from purity. The British were the primary importers of this drug, and had much investment in the dealings of opium. They resisted the decree, and continued to import it regardless of the wishes of the Chinese government.

The Chinese attempted to block the merchant vessels, and at one point set up a blockade of junk ships to prevent the British from entering the harbors. The Western ships were successfully turned away, but months later, the British returned. This time, with gunships.

The concept of "Self-Strengthening" was lost in the ensuing war over opium. The people of China overestimated their chances against the foreign power. They were match for the British weaponry, having only old-world artillery and outmoded weapons at their disposal. The Chinese suffered terrible defeat, and the people were humiliated, tortured, and even murdered in the streets. Tse Hui walked among the Chinese, attempting to guide the wounded to temples and other places of aid. He expected at any moment to be attacked by Wyrm-tainted soldiers that had come with the British boats. Tse Hui *was* attacked — but not by the Wyrm. Instead, Silver Fang and Shadow Lord representatives were on the ships, representing foreign interests, and they walked as men among the cramped avenues, shooting stragglers and knifing those who surrendered. Tse Hui barely escaped with his life.

My ancestor nursed his wounds, which healed over a few days time. But worse were the wounds that scored his soul, worse than any bullet or blade could have made. In 1842, China signed a "treaty" at Nanking with the British. The treaty gave no concessions to the people and granted the British imperialists extraordinary trade and governmental power, doubly humiliating the Chinese commoners.

It only grew worse after unleashing that Western empire. Britain gave many foreign powers direct access to China's resources, and soon every European country (and even America) would have its roots growing in Chinese soil. Farms were overtaken with little thought, the people put out into the rain or enslaved and carried away across oceans. All the while, Tse Hui watched and learned, and his heart grew as dark and cold as iron. He grew older and his body became weaker, but his mind and heart swelled with anger and fire. He sent whispers through his network of kin, nudging key figures this way and that way, until his words reached the ears of the Empress Dowager herself. She knew that it was

time for the foreign devils to relinquish their grip, and so she issued a statement of independence. This imperial message, sent to all the Chinese provinces, ended with one crucial sentiment: "Let us not think about making peace."

Tse Hui had been cultivating all along a secret group of commoners. Most were mortals, put off and cast away, though some were Garou or blood kin. This group, the Fists of Righteous Harmony, learned ancient fighting techniques and scraps of old magic. For the first months of the year 1900, the Fists attacked any and all foreign powers. Missionaries, merchants, soldiers — none could withstand the power of the Fists. Tse Hui had discarded the path of peace and had clothed himself in the raiments of war, and what a war it was. The foreigners began losing their grip, and were hedged in and surrounded in all the cities where they held court. The Fists almost won; but suddenly, at the last moment, reinforcements arrived from many different countries. Once again, the Silver Fangs and their Shadow Lord lackeys were present, and once again, China was humiliated. The capital city was looted and the Forbidden City was set aflame. And Tse Hui was captured and executed by the Shadow Lords as a "traitor" to the Garou Nation.

This was a dark time for China, and a dark time for us. Many of our kind hail from China, and even those of us like myself who come from different lands, our souls still feel the suffering put upon our ancestors. We feel the conflict inside. The foreigners came with much power and the Weaver's technology. The Wyrm was not the prevailing entity, and still it resulted in great anguish. The Garou who came and fought were not touched by the Corrupter, but acting only in the selfish interests of the West. It set us apart once and for all. It set the stage for things to come.

The Coming Sorrow

Some of our tribe feel that the End Times are not truly upon us, that it is little more than idle paranoia that happens at the turn of every century and millennium. Others are sure that the Sixth Age is here, or will be soon. A few even believe that our work grows futile and we are, as they say, doing little more than rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. One of our tribe, a mythsinger Galliard of Indonesia, believes that the Age of Sorrow has been building for a long time. She is Eyes-of-Star-Silver, and she will tell us now of her evidence:

I am your *dah ahiee*, your aunt, your sister, and I allow my voice to be carried to you spirits because the record must show. Long have we had proof that the End Times were coming. Many things have happened to push the Wheel closer to the next age, the Sixth Age, the Age of Sorrow. Now it has happened. Why did we do nothing?

Look to the death of many decades ago. One of my ancestors was a Stargazer who tried to free her Kinfolk from the terrible atrocities of the Japanese at Nanking. Hundreds of thousands of her friends and family, tortured and murdered. Tens of thousands of women, raped. I still feel that pain. Halfway across the world, millions died in separate Holocausts, many in Russia, many in Europe. The counterbalance of pain and suffering then fell the other way, and two terrible bombs were dropped, one on Hiroshima, the second on Nagasaki. Madame White, the terrible totem spirit of such atrocity was born out of the atomized flesh and hoary light. Later she would go on to grip many nations, even our own homeland of India in 1974 as the tests began in Pokhran. Even recently she took many lives, including those Stargazers at the Pusur River Sept in Bangladesh as a terrible weapon and ensuing storm ripped that land asunder.

In 1962, our two homeland nations fought during the Indo-China War. Over borders. Over land. Over dicing up the sickly skin of the Emerald Mother into segmented, well-ordered slices.

For years the Chinese Communists have come to our sacred places and gutted the land, taken the people, and used it for their own industrial ends. Ask the people of Tibet. Speak to the snow leopards of Shigalu. See where their spirits lie.

In India, the higher castes abuse the lower. They drive past in buses and cars, live in houses with indoor plumbing. The lower castes and the casteless are ignored, discarded, left in pits or boxes or alleys to live. Shitting in holes. Sleeping in filth.

In 1946, thousands of Japanese were interned in work camps in America. Today, hundreds of Arabic men and women are interned secretly there. America also came to Viet Nam and Korea to kill babies and poison the trees and the land.

All of this is the handiwork of the Spider. The Weaver works her webs behind all of it, ever tightening her strangling strands. She must be destroyed before we all turn blue and we die. The Wyrm is but a pawn caught in her snare. This century has been the Century of Want. The Century of Taking. The Spider has turned the sparks of mankind's needs and turned them into a conflagration of *desire*, and she has given man the tools to steal, take, and rape. This is a bad century, and will be an even worse one coming.

Those who have been blindsided by the Age of Sorrows have been blind all along. The Apocalypse has been long coming, and we have let this beast inside the house.

Shigalu and the Snow Leopard

A terrible thing, a terrible thing. When Shigalu fell, it was like someone had taken one of our own limbs and shattered the bone within. It was a great loss, and remains as a poison in the spirit of every Stargazer. If Shigalu could fall, it is reasoned, then nothing was safe. So any of us could fall into death or corruption, and this has been proven too many times in these grave times leading up to the last days. One of the few survivors of the massacre there will speak now. He is not one of us; he is a friend from the Silent Striders, but that does not diminish what he will tell you. He is also American. Hear now the tale of the fall of Shigalu as spoken by Benjamin Hobb, also called Shu-Ra Wolfchaser:

If the spirits aren't yet convinced that the end of the world is upon us, you only need to look at what happened on June 2nd, 1998, for your proof. I personally shouldn't have been there. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would've had trouble believing the Wyrm was even capable of doing what it had done that day.

I was in Tibet looking for evidence (living or otherwise) of an ancient, somewhat legendary breed of wolf, *Canis Niger*, the Tibetan Black Wolf. Some call me "Wolfchaser," because that's what I do. I try to find our wolf kin. I'm human-born, myself, but I fear that the wolf-born are dropping off the Wheel, and won't ever come back. The Tibetan Black Wolf's continued existence is supposed to be something near to a myth, almost as unlikely as Bigfoot but some jagglings suggested that they *do* still walk the land. Could they have our blood buried deep within their veins? Could it be reawakened through breeding or other magic? I had to know.

Unfortunately, I was a dumb-ass. I had all the regulation climbing gear, and I wagered that whatever I didn't have could be rectified by doing a little shapeshifting here and there — you know, claws on rocks, or a big hairy back to absorb a long fall? I was human when I was climbing, moving out of one of the many deep, wide passes that cut through the Himalayas. It was cold as shit, I was hungry, and for three days I hadn't even seen a *regular* Tibetan wolf, much less some fabled black wolf. I was out of my element. I figured I'd spend another day and get the hell out of Dodge.

I didn't study my history. I also didn't think to contact the sept there (actually, to be honest, I didn't even know there *was* a sept there). If I had, I might've known that the Chinese army controlled the area in an enforced almost-dictatorship. I also might've known that half the troops were Wyrm-blooded and they had a history of rearing up in sudden violence against the locals. Some say ignorance is bliss, but it didn't feel that way to me.

Because I didn't know any of this stuff, I was pretty damn surprised when I was climbing up the walls of the pass, dangling from a ledge alongside icicles as big as my arm, and a piecemeal helicopter came roaring past. I didn't think too much of it. Hell, I was just a guy, a *human-looking* guy to boot. The chopper came around for a second pass. There was the loud sound of machine gun fire, and bullets stitched up from my hip, across my back, up to my shoulders. And then I fell.

Only thing I remember after that is waking up at the monastery. I thought I had gone to some whacko Umbra when I woke up, on a stone floor, surrounded by burning braziers, with some big Viking-looking American standing over me, smiling. I thought I had really been knocked for a loop when he combed his fingers through his huge red beard and said he was a *Stargazer* by the name of John Campbell. Way he told it, he was out meditating with one of the warders, when he heard the gunfire in the distance. He thought to check it out, found me unconscious at the bottom of the Lalung Leh valley. (Note to self: When you're knocked stone-cold, sometimes it's a little hard to grab hold of that "healing factor" business.)

That was May 31st.

I spent the next two days... I don't know, just *being* there. It was like something out of a dream. It didn't seem cold; I mean, I know it was, but I could barely feel it. Everywhere I looked, there was something else to take in. Lean, tough-like-rope Crinos Garou in orange robes, doing *kata* postures, or eating rice out of wooden bowls while sitting in snow and ice. They all seemed slow and purposeful, as if existing somewhere just outside the edge of Time, where it didn't really matter. It wasn't my style, but I appreciated the outlook and, frankly, the time off.

The monastery itself was beautiful. It was tall and simple, and inside the building a spiral staircase went up and up, each time passing these intricate, intense friezes and paintings and carvings. All depicting the Garou, or the Wheel of Life (which looked enough like the Wheel of Ptah to keep my spirit soaring despite my failure on the mountain). Outside, down in a small valley, a tiny grove of trees poked through the snow, and it all looked perfectly sculpted. Some ceramic or stone mosaic sat in the center of these trees, and it complicated the eye just looking at it. I can't tell you how strong, or wise, I felt just being there.

John, the big sonofabitch, took me around to meet everyone. It was a small sept, but he said they always had new visitors. Some expected, and (he nudged me in the ribs on this one) some unexpected. He didn't know how right he was. It happened at dawn on the 2nd day of June. I was outside, trying to meditate and "sweep my thoughts away," but I wasn't doing a very good job. Again, if I'd known my history, maybe I'd have been more prepared. (Then again, maybe not.)

Tibet, I now know, has long been under the thumb of China. Occupation troops have been living there for some forty or fifty years. With the troops came the Wyrm. And that day, the Wyrm came marching up the pass, clothed in the skins and bones of Chinese soldiers. There were a great many of them; too many to stop, because each one had been hollowed out and filled with living taint.

Two helicopters came first. They swept low across the valley, only a dozen feet above the mosaic garden, and a hand fell on my shoulder. It was John. I didn't even realize he was behind me, and he just sighed deeply. He said to me, and I'll never forget this: "I hope you're ready to fight for something that isn't yours, Ben. *Because I smell something on the wind.*"

That was seconds before the gas canisters lobbed up into the meditation plaza and began hissing nerve gas. Gunfire erupted from the helicopters, and a thick column of fomor soldiers began rushing up the pass. They had rifles and pistols locked and loaded with silver. And when their ammunition ran out, they still had forearms carved of black

bone, teeth dripping black ichor, and tails slashing like whip-cord razors.

As the sun rose past the mountains, with a sky that was perfectly clear and perfect for peace and calm, almost everyone at Shigalu died. They fought long and hard. And so did I. The two sisters, the warders, fought together like a single animal, using each other as weapons, and it was a sight to see. But it wasn't enough. One had her throat slit wide by a soldier's barbed tongue. The other sister mourned, and as she did so, a sniper from a nearby ridge but a silver bullet through her head. While I watched in horror, I took several shots of silver to my own gut. John was behind me, pulling me away just before more bullets cut through the air where my head had been. He said there were only a few left, and they were taking me away to the Umbra. They were leaving.

I asked John if he was coming, and he said that he couldn't. Said that he once had great shame, and that Shigalu cured him of it, and he owed the place his life. He handed me off to Tara, the Keeper of the Land (and the tender of the mosaic garden), and we fled with six or seven others. In the Umbra, the nightmare wasn't over. Banes everywhere, and worse, a nexus crawler screaming, its body rippling and changing as the land beneath it turned black with stain. It came for us and I knew we were dead.

But then a great howl arose, and an awful wind picked up that didn't seem to touch a single one of us; but the banes and the crawler were affected by the strong gale, and were pushed out of the way by this Umbral current. It gave us enough of a window. We managed to escape.

Everyone was hurt. Tara herself couldn't stop coughing blood, and on the way out, one of the other Stargazers, a lupus called "Softly-Swells-the-Moon" died as her lungs expired in a gush of blood on her lips. We rested much later, and Tara sat with another, Wu Ying, and they talked about revenge. They spoke many things, and they cursed the Weaver, and they cursed the path of inaction, and they said that the Wyrm would spill much blood.

Even now, years later, I hear Tara's out there, recruiting for a vengeful assault back on the stolen caern. From what I've been told, the Wyrm has raped the place of resources and filled its own belly with the spirit energy that comes from the caern's heart. But Tara believes it can be saved. And in the meantime, she destroys anything that she associates with the Weaver, believing it to be the true enemy of Gaia.

Maybe she's right. But what I saw that day didn't have the static hands of the Weaver on it; it had the fingerprints of the Corrupter. But that doesn't matter, now. What does matter is this: I'm alive, and as long as I am, if any – and I mean *any* — Stargazer needs help from Benjamin Hobb, they have it. Somehow, though, I don't think my help will be enough. I fear for that tribe. I don't think they're going to be around much longer.

The Red Star

I am going to once again call upon my own voice to tell you of something quite troubling. I hope you'll entertain my voice for a brief time:

It is spoken that, the night Shigalu fell, the wind spirits howled in the Umbra and our ancestors wept tears of blood into our hearts. It's also something of a legend that this is the same night that the red star appeared in the sky.

Some could see it, others could not. Some were able to always see it, but only in the Umbra, where others were able to squint and view it from outside the Mirror Lands. Others saw it in neither, but always in dreams.

It appeared, an unknown perforation in the night sky. There is a small story about a figure in our history called Tian Gou Xing, a Stargazer from the earliest dawn who mistakenly transcended to the next plane instead of staying behind to shepherd those who are lost. In his transition from here to the Heavens, he became bodiless, a shining figure in the sky called the Heavenly Wolf Star by his sept. In the black beyond above the heads of all, Tian Gou Xing supposedly held fast to the network of stars and helped guide travelers through the cosmic byways. This transition was not so easy, the legend goes, and those unlucky enough to be among the Heavens when Tian Gou Xing fell into his occasional restless rages did not usually return from their journey. The story says that, when angered, Tian Gou Xing turns a terrible red, and consumes all who are near. It is during this time that the moon or sun will go into eclipse, for it is the Heavenly Wolf Star instigating such darkness.

Is the red star Tian Gou Xing? Has he become so angry that he cannot become calm? Is this an indication of where our tribe is going? Others say that this red star is the Wyrm, or perhaps the Wyrm's eye staring through to us. Or that perhaps it is a doorway into the Wyrm's own heart, or that it is a great star falling toward our world, ready to extinguish Gaia in one terrible motion.

I myself cannot know. None of us can. I have heard of those who have gone to the Heavens, but I have heard no other word. What I do know is that, in the last several months, I have dreamed of the red star every night. I see it coming toward me. I see it watching me. I hear the howls of the Heavenly Wolf Star, and come morning I write secret prayers on *kangshin* paper to try to appease Tian Gou Xing and help him find his center. But it is no use. The dreams worsen, and my sleep lessens. It is a bad omen.

Invitations

As the spirits are surely aware, our tribe is no longer a part of the Sunset People. The Garou Nation is still an ally, of course, but no longer provides us with roof or food. We officially belong to the Beast Courts, though there are still those who reject this proclamation just as others have rejected the Garou themselves. One of the Changing Blood, a wereraven called Hairukoo the Feather-Robed, has an account to share with you now regarding the way in which we came to be leave the West and return home:

Shigalu fell, the Snow Leopard bled from its heart, and what did the Western Garou do? They sighed, shrugged their shoulders, and blinked like dumb puppies. They mumbled "sorry" and "my condolences" to the wrong parties and then promptly went back to their infighting and inbreeding. I am young still, but even I have long-known many of the Stargazers, and they do not belong with these animals. They belong with us. Hence why they were invited to be with us, to join in our sentai, to sit with us at our many Courts and preside over issues like rational, calm-hearted beings. We eat off of plates, thank you very much. We don't dip our muzzles in mud-running gutters to sniff for food like our Western cousins.

I was there when the invitation was extended, you see. We were to meet on the other side of the Altai Mountains, in a small village of kin set in the center of long stretches of grazing land. This village, Tonghai, is why the documented record declaring the Stargazers a part of our Courts is called "The Heavenly Accord of Tonghai," you see? There were seven of our kind meeting with seven of the poor, bedraggled tribe. Each with an accompaniment of helpers and lesser members (which is where I fit in). We sat together with tea and bread to discuss this situation. As it is with the Stargazers, nothing could be moved forward without interminable hours of painful discussion and debate. It is good that no one asks them for quick decisions, yes? The talks went on for the better portion of a week. At the end of it, six of the seven Garou agreed, and said *Yes, we will join your wonderful way of living.* The seventh, a Siberian Stargazer called Ulu Toyo'n, declined to be a part of what we were offering, and went back home. I hear he leads the charge to return the tribe to the Sunset Peoples, which is a grave and extremely reckless mistake.

But that fool was in the minority, and so the Stargazers accepted our charitable invitation. Their spirit messengers were sent beneath the glorious eye of the sun to the remaining members of the tribe to tell them that their new path had become illuminated by our good graces. As I hear it, the flight from the Western wolves was terribly quick and quiet. They simply *vanished.* They had few ties to packs or septs, and where once they were, suddenly they were not. Like a departing fog... one minute, it is there, and the next? There is no fog.

And so we brought them to our many courts. The Court of the Walled Lake alone has many Stargazer brothers and sisters, who help all of us adjudicate over many pressing issues. (Of course, they are not allowed yet to lead the discussions or make autonomous decisions; they have not had their mettle tested properly. This will take time.) Over the years, they will become a part of the seamless whole. It will be a time of great balance, perseverance, and temperance. There are those who point to us and our Stargazer friends, and they say, "You have decided to sit out on the Apocalypse!" No, no. The End Times, I can assure you, will not be quick. It will be like a slow beast, dying. We must take time to think best on how to reverse this effect. Acting quickly and rashly will only sink us further in the mire. The Stargazers have always known this, which is why they are now considered equal (or almost, at least) with us.

Homecoming

For further words on the subject of the Stargazers' flight from the Western Nation of the Garou, you may consult with Jata, the Hawk of Heaven, a Stargazer Philodox:

You can hear it, if you listen. The clock has struck the Sixth Age. They say it's the Time of Sorrow, and that makes perfect sense to me, for I have a monstrous swelling of sorrow in my heart.

When we left the West, it was truly a great egress. It didn't matter where we were. We simply picked up under the darkness of the new moon, and slipped away like a slice of paper on the wind. It also didn't matter what we were involved with. Part of a pack? Not any longer. Protecting an ancient spirit tree, guarding it from the poison that seeks its roots? The tree is now alone. It was as if everything in the West was an illusion, was anathema to our very purpose. Why stay? Who were we fooling? Nobody wanted us, nobody needed us. And like a child sulking, we took our toys and crept home.

I was a caern warder. I belonged to the Sept of the Morning Sky, at the Caern of the Bleeding Stream deep in the Appalachians in North Carolina, in the U.S. I came to be there because it was a caern of great vision. If one were brave enough, one could tackle the prophecies that came by bathing in the waters just downstream from the caern's center, and I did that as often as my head could stand it. I saw glorious things, and I saw terrible things. In glory, I saw triumph in the dark heart of Africa, where an awful black-toothed beast was destroyed. In terror, I watched as Gaia lost her footing and became unable to stand on the great tortoises that support her, and from it I felt fire from the sky and ice from the oceans, and I could smell the Wyrm's breath. In confusion, I watched as a hundred shadows, looking to the stars, eased silently away. It was a good caern. It was a strong place.

I left, regardless. The decision was made, and it seemed the right thing to do. When Shigalu fell, I was heartbroken, but did anyone console me? No, I suppose they didn't. And they didn't understand, anyhow. At least, that's what I thought. So when it came time to leave, I was more than willing.

Three weeks later, the caern was attacked. Much like Shigalu was, but instead of soldiers the enemy wore corporate uniforms and orange jumpsuits. And the attack brought Black Spirals, as well. Death came not swiftly enough for my once septmates. Spirits like yourselves whisper that at least three of them were not killed outright, but taken away to be tortured and indoctrinated in the ways of the Wyrm.

I didn't think of it then. I couldn't. But there were breaks, cracks, fractures, and over time the dreams began. Not dreams of prophecy, but dreams of imagining. Imagining what it was like when the monsters scraped their claws against the pregnant belly of Glitterchain, the Bone Gnawer who was a warder with me. In my mind's eye I saw them take the Crown of Laurel off of our leader, an old Silver Fang called Lord Yorick. I saw the cubs slaughtered. In my head, the stream ran with real blood, friends' blood, *my* blood.

Would it have stopped if I had been there? Could it have been averted? Were my claws and teeth the one thing missing from saving them all? I can't say. I don't know. But what I do know is that we have made a terrible error. I recognize that I'm in the minority here, but we left our duty. We packed our bags and fled our posts, leaving the company of those we were meant to be with. And why? Because we felt the other Garou weren't *sympathetic* enough? Because they didn't have the proper gleam in their eye when Shigalu was spoken of? We're fools. Our kind is bred against such sympathies. We're Luna's children, and have been made to endure a million grievances since we were given to Gaia, and over time our hearts have hardened and petrified. Did we expect pity? And why were we angry when we didn't get it?

And so, we left. But I'm going back. If only for a short time, if only to honor those who fell. I know I wouldn't have saved them, but I should've been there to die with them. I have escaped my duty, and as such, I have escaped Gaia's notice. I fear I am worthless, now.

I offer, for a moment, a small interjection and another voice on the subject that disagrees with what Jata has said. Here, now, is the whisper of Fu Xi the Ghostwight:

I've always been in the Middle Kingdom. Somewhere, doing something. I've been a part of many a sentai, raiding bakemono interests, brokering secret deals with the cruel Kuei-Jin, traveling from court to court with spirits trapped in tear bottles. I myself am like a spirit, my skin chalky-white and always flaking. If you look hard enough, you can see the dark arterial rivers running below my papery flesh, even when I change, for I *also* was blessed with the wonderful benefit of being born with not a single sprout of fur or hair across my entire body. Excellent, yes?

Here, no one cares. In fact, I am given some reverence due to the way I look. My teachings of the spirits, my private audience with the beings of the stars, can go unhindered. And when the time comes, people will listen to the prayers I speak. Here, I am equal to all. We are in balance.

Two years ago, however, I was in Hong Kong, conferring with a jury of spirits (plastic, glass, and circuitry) in an attempt to stop prejudicial treatment of other, dissident spirits in the area (spirits of flower, tree, and sky). But apparently, I stepped on some toes. The modern spirits had already sworn allegiance to a local pack of Shadow Lords. Shadow Lords that were not *Hakken*, were not local. White men, *gwailo*, *gaijin*, ghosts more ghostly than I. And those spirits with their loose tongues, they went ahead and tattled on me. It wasn't long before the Shadow Lords came for a "chat," as they so delicately put it.

I was never a fighter. There is always a better way, a diverted path that can take you away from such foolish, slipshod warring. That's not to say I can't fight! Or that I don't have tricks of my own. But those tricks weren't enough. The Garou came, babbling in English, and they put me in my place. They didn't kill me; they simply left me with enough

cuts from claw and scrapes from fang and threw me in a dumpster. Calling *me* the ghost. Calling *me* a *gwailo*. Idiots.

I survived. The cuts healed, except for one. A pink scar below my eye. For months I had to reestablish relationships with old spirits, as they didn't "believe" I was who I was, that the scar indicated I was perhaps some poorly cobbled-together clone meant to shatter their confidences.

Yes, we left. Was it a mistake? Not a chance. Most of us were already over here, anyway. The Western Nation of Garou are a lot of mouth-breathers and inbred Shih-tzus. Let the spirits know that we are happy with our decision, that we've done the proper thing. We've put ourselves on the proper side of balance again. The one side of the scale, the Eastern scale, did not have enough weight in its pan, so it came down to us to even the odds. Besides, if the future holds to the visions, the Garou will began to fall one by one. I have heard messages from other spirit-speaking brothers, and they murmur in soft tones, *One tribe shall fall*... will it be ours? Or has our choice allowed us to remain?

Finally, a third viewpoint. Meru High-Mountain, a great ritemaster of the Indian Stargazers, tells us of another option for our dissonant ranks of scattered Garou:

This talk of our glorious "return" or our cowardly "retreat" strikes me as little more than meaningless noise. There are those of us who never belonged to either the Garou Nation of the West or of the Beast Courts of the East. We are the Stargazers of India, and we owe allegiance to none. We are casteless, universal, and unfettered.

The Indo-China War, some forty years ago, drove many of our tribe out of India and China alike. They couldn't handle the concept that, in a matter of speaking, their two "parents" were fighting, over little more than petty border disputes. Many among us couldn't take it, and thus they fled to the West. At the time, America and Europe were lands of safety, and many bred there which is why you see many Stargazers of white and black skin.

Now it is time to return home. A terrible thing happened a few years back, in 1999. Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan alike felt the reverberations of a nightmare that swept both the physical world and the Mirror Lands alike. Help is needed to curtail the swelling of the Wyrm's evil that breeds here, free as it has never been before. Many of our kind fall to the Great Corrupter, turning away from Gaia and bowing down as dogs to their new master. The balance hasn't just tipped, it has been shattered.

This "homecoming" is a new opportunity. I ask you spirits to call all of our brothers and sisters and ask them to deny the shackles of both sides of the world, for we are all one, and need no council to guide us. Only Gaia's words alone shall heal us and drive us ever forward. We are here, we are waiting, and our numbers in this land grow close to their original numbers, and soon they shall surpass. Let the Garou Nation squabble in politics and let the Beast Courts contend with their lofty rituals. We will be here. Sacrificing ourselves and our souls for the greater good. Homecoming, indeed.

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Chapter Two: The Breath of Dying Orchids

Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster.
— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The Tribe, Today

Spirits, I presume you appreciate honesty as much as I. As a tribe, we are facing terrifying obstacles. What will happen to us? Am I providing you with this record so it may be finally written into the stars so that we may die peacefully? Or am I hoping to convince you of something as yet unseen? Our tribe is in great pain. We are not in balance. Many of our tribe will not tell you this. They will wear a peaceful face and tell you something that isn't directly a lie, but doesn't necessarily taste of truth, either. And so, when telling you the nature of the Stargazers in this modern day, how we are, what we do, and where we are heading, I have a choice. Do I cover it up with half-truths and placid stares? Or do I find a voice that delves deep, reaches high into the dark stretch of stars and pulls out the truth no matter how painful it may be? I promise truth at every turn. And so again I go to Peter Cleartongue:

One of the jewels in our crown was crushed to dust. Shigalu? Gone. The Snow Leopard caern? Gone. In that monastery were records. Our records. Long scrolls, carvings on the walls, stories written on vellum parchment tucked in some semblance of books. They're all gone, too. Whatever name you want for the beast — the Wyrm, Kung-Kung, Darkness, Centipede, Raksha — came and took everything away from us. But we're Stargazers, right? We're not judged by our possessions. What we possess in this material plane is transitive, fleeting, meaningless. We lost Shigalu? We'll have it again, either in this Age or the next. And so, as a tribe, this is our clarion call, the time that we have placed our differences aside and have become a single, conjugal whole. We've crawled out of every knothole and dropped from every cloud bank to return home, to the East, all in one single, unified front.

Sadly, that's all bullshit. You'd think it would be, wouldn't you? Many will tell you that it *is* true, that we have finally come together, that we stand with one another in all things. But that isn't the real deal. The real deal is this: Shigalu and the subsequent homecoming have polarized us. There were essentially three divisions before — the dutiful Garou, the Weaver-haters, and those who favor the path of a tranquil soul. Now, to add more cooks to the kitchen, two more separations have occurred. There are those who have gone home, who have seceded silently from the Garou

Nation and now belong solely to the Beast Courts scattered across Asia. Then there are those who feel that they are Garou, and Garou alone, and will not be pried from their position in the West. If I had to pick, I'd say the majority have gone home. It seems a far smaller number counting those that have stayed behind; but I don't want to give the impression they don't exist. I've been around in these last years, and I've seen many that remain at caerns, still belong to packs, or even travel as solitary beings wherever they please regardless of "affiliation." They're out there. And they will not be moved.

Now, to throw *more* meat on the cookfire, let's examine the fact that our numbers are incredibly low. There were a great many of us at Shigalu that died, but even before that, our ranks were dwindling to a handful of rice grains. Nobody knows exactly how many of us there are left (though if we had proper organization and didn't always try to be so blithely fucking ignorant, perhaps we'd know). I've heard that we don't tally up to more than a couple hundred, but I have to hope in my heart of hearts that there are more of us out there.

And there's your secret, right there. We're a good, smart tribe. Many have fallen to Harano, it's true. Hard not to be sad in a time like this, I'm the first to admit. But the secret is, we're also a *hopeful* tribe. Our understanding of this place (and our place in it) runs far deeper than any other. We know the way the Wheel turns. We know that the Sixth Age has eased open its eyes and begin to cry great tears of sorrow for what is to come. But we also know that things that die are inevitably reborn and, simply put, what goes around... comes around. We have much hope, every one of us. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, *we're in the gutter looking up at the stars, baby.*

New Cubs

Most of our tribe are born in the East. Have been before, and will be doubly so now that our breeding pool has been mostly localized. Those born and taught there will now face a different challenge than they had before. Once upon a time, the challenge involved existing in a society of Garou that either despised you, didn't understand you, ignored you, or some combination of the three. Other Stargazers were present, of course, and would keep you away from the other Garou as long as possible so as to immerse you in the proper ways of our existence. Your Rage would be tempered, you'd be given an understanding of our role in all this mess. But eventually you'd be out there. Among them. Among the other werewolves. And it was rarely easy.

Now, there's a different challenge. One that would seem easier at first glance, but sometimes calm waters hide turbulent currents, know what I mean? The Garou Nation is no longer a gauntlet that needs to be passed for our Eastern brethren. No, now the gauntlet is that of the *Beast Courts*, and I promise you that it is a whole other ballgame. From day one, a Stargazer cub is immersed in the ways of the Beast Courts. They are not allowed to be taken aside until later; the court system demands that they begin their training in the proper manners of the court right out of the gate. That means knowing every line of the codes of behavior, called the Mandates. It also means understanding the system of renown — and the Way of Emerald Virtue varies big time from the system of reputation granted by the Garou Nation. In fact, consider the problem that a Stargazer's status, no matter how old and wise and powerful that Stargazer is, *doesn't translate* into the Way of Emerald Virtue. They start over. *Tabula rasa*, spirits. Can you imagine a elder Stargazer being taught how to hold his tea-cup by some impudent Kitsune? No need to imagine, because it's for real.

Everything is different. Many Stargazer mentors don't know how to properly instruct their cubs, as they themselves have just recently been instructed in these new ways. How should one address a Kitsune Regent? Why is it proper for some to make utilitarian allegiances with *some* of the Wyrm-stinking Kuei-Jin, but not others? What does that tell you? It tells you that we thought we had our own home waiting for us. But the reality is, we're simply sleeping in someone else's.

So cubs in the East must endure the new rigors, rigors that the elders of our tribe don't even understand yet. The young ones will be fine. They will enter into it properly, from the beginning, and in a decade they'll be different creatures than we ever were. But what of the cubs that remain — or are born in — the West?

Basically, it's business as usual for them. They're not taught the ways of the Beast Courts because they're not *in* the Beast Courts. They're still living in the brutal Garou Nation, and so they are raised as such. Though, in truth, many aren't really brought into the Garou world much. In the West, the tradition of mentoring a cub has become something of a solitary lifestyle. A single Stargazer will take a student, and the two will remain a unit until the elder dies or the younger is old enough to take on their own apprentice. They stay out of Garou business until it's absolutely necessary, and operate according to their own tenets. No eyes watch them. No one holds them to rules.

Some cubs, of course, are trained in a sept — sometimes by a Stargazer, and if one isn't available, then by whatever Garou is best-suited for the position. These Stargazers end up as dutiful Garou, and look less like the Stargazers of the East and more like Garou of

the Nation. They still follow our paths, they still attempt to curtail the anger that bubbles within, but ultimately they do as other Garou do. They fight the Wyrm. They protect the caerns. They eat, sleep, breathe, and breed. Such it is with any one group. You'd like to think you can pin them down to one stereotype, but that's impossible. Judging us is a case of letting more snakes out of the bag than you can kill. A brave effort, but futile.

Western Stargazers

It seems a common misconception that Stargazers cannot be truly of the West. They must be Asian in some way, shape, or form, right? Somewhere there has to be a hint of slanted eyes or jaundiced skin, yeah? No. When I tell other Garou that I'm a Stargazer, they like to point to my red hair and beard. My freckles. They call me Fianna. Or Get. Or Gaian or Gnawer or Glass Walker. They'd rather me be a Black Fury than accept me as a Stargazer. But it's true. We exist. We're not altogether too common, no. But we're out there, every race, creed, and color. You think every Stargazer down the line has controlled their urges to the point of breeding *only* with Asians? Please.

Whether we're Stargazers without Asian blood or Asian-blooded Stargazers who were born and raised in the West, we represent a unique subset of the tribe that faces, appropriately, a unique dilemma. If we remain in the West, then the majority of our tribe labels us dissenters, traitors, Weaver-lovers, Garou-slaves, whatever. "But the West is our home!" we cry. And we're mocked. Or ignored. Or left behind and considered to be less than half-blooded stepchildren. So, with that in mind, many of us Western Garou have fled America, Canada, Europe or wherever, and "gone home," as the term tends to be. There our kind faces another problem. We are greeted with smiling faces, open arms, and a warm bottle of sake, but there lies a hidden river of prejudice that runs against us. Not a single one of our kind has been given a position – not even a low courtier role — in the courts over there. In a sentai war party, we're given dismissive roles. "Stay behind and guard that," or worse, "charge in while we stay behind." If we're given housing, it's at the outskirts of the land. When invited to a tea ceremony, our tea is poured dead last every time. It even reflects in you *spirits* over there. They frown, cluck their ethereal lips, and wonder why some gwailo with an American accent is cajoling them for aid.

So, you see the dilemma. In the West, we're at home. But our own tribe looks poorly upon us, and that hurts having your own family look down at you like you just deflowered your cousin. In the East, we're "at home" despite the fact it doesn't feel like home, and

our own tribe cares for us but every other Changing Blood of the Beast Courts (sans the Hakken; they've actually been pretty helpful) looks at us like we're newborn *metis*. This here is a clear-cut case of "damned if you do, damned if you don't."

Those of us who stay in the West, what do we do? As I said, many continue on as they have always continued. One Stargazer teaches another, and they do the best they can as a pair in thwarting the Wyrm and guiding others to some level of peace and enlightenment. But that tradition is waning. The Stargazers who have stayed in the West are a little more hard-line, and seem to have a greater grasp of their sense of responsibility. One trend I've noticed (and a trend I myself follow) is that we are collecting in full-blown Stargazer packs, these days. Once, we either took one of two courses. We accepted our place in the mentor/student dichotomy, or we entered into a pack of non-Stargazer Garou in an effort to do the duty of Gaia despite the disdain we often received. But now, to see that there are whole packs of Stargazers running about... it's a hopeful thing. It speaks of the ancient ways, when we used to be a powerful force traveling together, operating as a single unit much as the sentai do in the East. I've even heard rumors that the Jade Sentai is being reborn. If that's true, then I have big hope, indeed.

Eastern Stargazers

Our greatest numbers lie in Asia, or scattered throughout. Many lie on the outskirts of Beast Court influence (India, Pakistan), but most live squarely in the major domains of Asia — China and Japan, specifically. Once again, it's near impossible to sum up the Stargazers of the Middle Kingdom in a singular statement. Saying "the Eastern Stargazers do *this*, *this*, and *this*," might be right for one, but then some other 'Gazer comes around the corner and proves you wrong in every instance. We're not big Weaver-lovers, we leave that up to the Glass Walkers, but I've seen Stargazers who know their way around a computer system, who can talk to the elementals of plastic and polymers. It's also assumed that we all know kung-fu, that we shave our heads and wear the orange robes of the Buddhist monks. Okay, some of our tribe do. I've also known many a Stargazer who wouldn't know the Eightfold Path or the Mantis stance from a cell phone.

The majority of the Stargazers in the East belong to the Beast Courts. They follow the Mandates and war against the bakemono and all the agents of the Great Centipede. These Stargazers fight an uphill battle. They're the new kids on the playground, as it were, and they have to earn the respect and renown that they may have been afforded (or not) among one another and among the other Garou. They struggle to obtain positions in the courts, to lead the sentai, to be entered into the records of legend. The Stargazers have always walked outside the traditional ways of the Garou, but the stinking stigma of the Garou Nation's actions still hangs on them like a skunky perfume. Many still associate us with the War of Shame, or with the Impergium. Occasionally an Eastern Stargazer must field comments about how "we helped kill the bear-changers." If ever there is a time when containing one's Rage seems impossible, I'd wager that's it.

Some Eastern Stargazers choose not to exist among the Beast Courts. They're not precisely outcasts, but they're not invited along on war parties unless absolutely necessary. And they can't really belong to the Garou Nation there, either, so what do they do? They do as they've always done, which is serve the Emerald Mother (or Gaia, or T'ai-Shen) however they decide is best. Some choose to teach and enlighten the mortal masses, some sit with the hsien or the Namebreakers in an effort to learn the mysteries that the past and future hold. I've known Stargazer monkeywrenchers who attack the Wyrm-ridden corporations of China, I've met tribe members who live reclusive lives among the Ainu of Japan, I've encountered demon hunters, bamboo-cutters, bodhisattvas and lunatic warlords. Our tribe is not one thing, no matter where we operate. We're all over the map, and my only problem is figuring out whether that's our greatest strength or our greatest weakness. And, speaking of weakness...

The Schism of Three

It's an irreparable rift, I'm afraid. Our tribe, broken down into three wildly separate components, unable to see eye-to-eye. This cosmic disagreement rarely puts us at physical odds with one another, as that isn't our way. But it also is like a wall built up between each side, stopping our own limited numbers from learning from one another, helping each other, and mixing together the lingering strength of our waning blood. When did the schism occur? They say sometime around the Mongol incursions. But I think it happened much earlier than that.

The Traditionalists

The Traditionalists (also called "the dutiful") consider themselves Garou, through and through. Many have joined the Beast Courts as is the will of the tribe, but many have also remained behind, lingering as a part of the Garou Nation as that is how best they identify themselves. They follow the paths of moderation, but rarely engage in extreme asceticism or any other behavior that would diminish their Garou natures and instincts. They are warriors, teachers, phi-

losophers, concerned somewhat with their spiritual paths but concerned moreso for the fate of Gaia. Once, the majority of our tribe belonged to this slice of the pie, but I'm not so sure anymore. They're at least the ones who interact most often with the Fera of the Beast Courts and the other Garou. In my mind, we're the ones getting our hands dirty, knowing that following the precepts of our ancestors is the way to wisdom. The Traditionalists, myself among them, are the wisest of the Garou. We follow the understanding that all things must be done in moderation. It's no great secret. If only the others felt that way.

The Transcendent

The Transcendent have taken their Garou natures and suppressed them. They've held these instincts down deep in the darkness of their own souls until they've drowned like whelp cubs. I appreciate their line of thinking, that peace and inaction will help them purify their own souls. Our tribal way of thinking does indicate that we must be exemplary in all ways. The theory holds that if everybody took care of their own soul, the world would be filled with good souls with no room for the Wyrm to muscle in. Yeah, in a perfect world. But we don't live in a perfect world, do we? We live firmly rooted in reality, and a lifetime of meditation will not cure what ails us. They deny themselves all pleasures, all vices, any and all indulgences. Overt action — action without thinking, without long contemplation — is seen as shameful. So, the majority of the time they do little except seek inner wisdom, blinking their third eyes clean of any obstructions. And while they meditate, Gaia withers. The path of moderation is long lost to them. The worst part is, after the beating we took with Shigalu, we needed time to lick our wounds. But many of our tribe took that time to embrace their inaction, not hate it. To me, it's just fear given another more noble name, and with it, our tribe grows ever weaker.

The Trappists

These Stargazers (not to be confused with the order of monks of the same name) toe the other extremity opposing our tribe's desired moderation. The Tranquil wish to remain inactive whenever possible, but the Trappists have declared war and remain so at every breathing moment. They have one enemy, and her name is the Weaver. This Triatic member, they say, has "trapped" us all, and we must always struggle to discard these "trappings" and leave them behind (understand the name, now?). But they don't just preach disavowal of the Weaver's ways. No, these Trappists take their battle to the Queen Spider whenever able. They run through the cities, seeking to free Gaia (and our own tribe) by destroying the Weaver's strongest anchors. In the Umbra, they go far and deep into the spirit world in an effort to roust out the spider spirits wherever they may nest, and put them to the torch. In their minds, Gaia would be a far better place without the Weaver's own webs strangling her, though in that crusade they seem to forget that not only has the Queen Spider helped to give stability to the firmament, but that the Wyrm actively opposes and harms the Emerald Mother. I'm no great lover of the Weaver, for that mad queen is out-of-control. But again, I strive to impress upon you, Council of Spirits, that we seek *moderation* first over all things. That is the nature of balance, after all. The sooner the rest of our tribe (and the other Garou) learn this, the better off all will be.

Differing Opinions

Cleartongue explains much, but he has his own way, for he is a devout Traditionalist. But it seems unfair not to give the others a voice in our eternal record, does it not? Let us hear first from a devotee of the Transcendent, Saram Snow-on-Treetops. He will defend his beliefs:

We are bound by things we cannot know and cannot see. We are bound by the void. It has no description, no boundaries. If you must have words to describe it, then you may call it inexhaustible. And vast. And forever moving in great cycles. Those who do not move with the cycles cause themselves too much worry, too much stress, and it destroys them. There is no direction to take, no path to follow, no actions to judge. If the cosmos is that way, then we should be that way, as well.

Our critics find it easy to say that, with us, we are pinioned by our restraint, holding too dearly to a course of inaction over action. But it is not so simple as that. Look at a river. The river doesn't act. It doesn't consciously change itself, doesn't hold to a morality that must impinge its movement. The river merely is. It exists and moves according to its nature. The only time this is different is when man or beast blocks the way of the river, and this is unnatural, and does more harm than good.

It is similar with us. We do not sit idly by, but we don't act according to others' designs. We merely are. Intuition guides us. We let our minds wander into the void through periods of meditation. We starve ourselves, cut our flesh, stare at the pinprick network of the luminaries in the sky above. We seek wisdom within, not without.

Social conventions mean little. Nor do pre-designed paths. We elude such trimmings and let our choices be what they may be without worry, without forcing them. In Lao-Tzu's book, he writes, "The

softest thing in the universe overcomes the hardest thing in the universe." To force things are to break them. To force balance, to shackle the Emerald Mother to a prescribed way of doing things, this will break her, just as the Wyrm will break her. Patience is key. Others say that Gaia dies? We counter with, *Gaia lives*. When the times do come that our movement is required, we will do as the river does. We will go with the flow, forever on, forever more.

Now we give time to listen to the voice of one of the Trappists, as Cleartongue calls them. They are those who oppose the Weaver in all forms, seeking to undermine her third force of Reality. I am sad to say that this speaker you're about to hear perished not long after he and I met for the first time. He was lupus, rare among his own, and with streaks of holy black through his fur. Now he's gone, his soul soon to be reborn, and for that there must be some joy. For now, listen to the echoes of his snarls. Listen to Howl-Sky-Screamer, a powerful young Ragabash who left us too soon:

Little spiders. Biting, chewing, spitting, weaving. I sit on this rocky step, and I look out over the graveyard my brothers call a "city." City? What is that but a place for the monkeys to play? A forest of concrete and a desert of smooth black rock and a horrible ghost with eyes of glass. I am tired of the city. I have been to the city. Want to hear about my times in that bad place? I'll tell you. Three years ago I went into the city and a pile of trash and filth and vermin offal attacked me, the smell of the Corruptor making me sick to my guts. That was when I lost part of my right ear. Two years ago I went into the city to find one of our two-leg tribeswomen to bring her a spirit I had tricked into a rock. And two monkeys in blue put a metal bee in my hind. One year ago, I went to the city to help one of the fox-changers in solving a riddle that was given to him by the City Father. On the way to meet the fox-man, a monster juggernaut of men-steel and spider-rubber came and drove over me, shattering my back. That took me months to heal. And just three weeks ago, I went into the city one last time. There I found and brought back the bodies of three of my kin. Two females, and one male cub. The monkey over-population drove them into the city. There they drank from puddles, needing water. They didn't know the water was poison. They didn't know the water was the blood of machines. It killed them. Emptied their stomachs from their mouths. That was the last time I went into the city.

I used to enjoy puzzles. Small games to sharpen my wit. How can I make the pigeon fly to me so I can eat it? How does that stupid fish swim up the river instead of down it? How can I turn the monkey traps against the monkeys instead of against my kin? How many little lights in the big sky does it take to sketch the faces of my wolf-kin ancestors? I always have questions, and I always enjoyed finding the answers. The city was a worrying question. What do we do with it? It is a big and terrible place, but so many of my kind say it's necessary. One more piece of the balancing whole. I never understood, but I always tried to. I am now tired of trying.

I no longer enjoy puzzles. Once I asked myself and my brothers and sisters, what will we do about this city? Now I don't ask anymore. All the lines running to that awful graveyard, silken with steel webs and a play land for crazy spiders, I no longer wish to figure that out. I have come up with my own answer. With others of my kind I will seek out the Weaver who makes the little spiders who makes the city, and I will cut out her heart. There will be no thought. I will not have to ponder this like I have been taught. It will be fast and just. Then balance will truly have been restored, and we will be free to roam the woods again without worrying about drinking poison from the ground. We can stare up at the sky and ask our old dead packs for guidance. We can return to the small, safe puzzles, for we will have rid ourselves of the biggest one of all. The Queen Spider will die.

The Way of the Tribe

We do not share much in common with the other tribes, or even those of the Changing Blood. Our way is distinctly our own, a mingling mix of many peoples, places, and times. I find it best to explain our beliefs and the paths we follow in a simple manner, for we are ultimately simple creatures. Agastya Ten-Arrows was one of our eldest and wisest warrior sages, and sadly perished during the grim and cataclysmic events that took place in her homeland of Bangladesh a few years previous. Hear now her explanation of our true way:

I am a Stargazer. I am half-moon, born of humans. I have contemplated much in the dark skies above and in the dark swirl of tea left in a tea cup, and I have much blood that will never wash off of my hands. I am a Stargazer.

We are not one thing. We do not share a single eye or a single mind. When viewed from your window, how does snow look? White, uniform, all-encompassing. But each flake, as we know, is different from the last. Together they make one thing but separate they are hardly alike.

Our ways are many, but our Way is one. None are required to follow our Way, but this path runs through the hearts of all our cubs, a seed that can flourish with just a moment's attention. We teach lessons to one another, from sage to student, and more importantly

from student to sage. These lessons are what I will share with you, so that you spirits may know what they are and speak of them should we be reborn in the next Age

The Two Precepts

All Stargazers learn two things before they are allowed to learn others. Mentors and pack leaders have different methods to express these lessons, but express them they must.

All life is suffering. That is the first precept. In all things, there is suffering. Gaia bleeds. We weep. Humans wound one another. Words hurt. Blades slash. Claws cut. It is behind everything, this suffering. That's not to say there can be no happiness. But happiness can only be found through the realization that everyone and everything must endure a constant state of suffering.

For all its obviousness, this is the hardest lesson to teach. I have seen mentors or pack and sept leaders do much to enforce this precept. I have seen cubs sent to my home city of Calcutta to witness how, quite clearly, the world and its people are sick and choking. I have seen cubs made to meditate without food, rest, or water so that they may learn such truth. I have even seen a sage whip a cub with a bamboo rod for days, weeks, even months until that cub is ready to accept the reality of suffering. Once they do, they may move to learn the second precept:

The only way out of suffering is the Middle Way. The Middle Way is the path of ultimate moderation, of balance in totality. All things are of Gaia, but one must not overestimate or undervalue the world around us that is the combined craft of Reality, Passion, and Darkness. No thing is an enemy unless it seeks to cause imbalance. We ourselves must strive for balance. Many teachers impose the lessons that our most ancient ancestors were required to learn for themselves. Teachers force students into extremes. They make apprentices starve themselves, cut themselves, overindulge in both pleasure and pain. Soon the realization comes that these things are a part of us, but should not consume us. All things are of Gaia, we may taste of Her fruits but never eat them whole. Restraint and temperance in every action we take is the only way to find a constant state of bliss outside of forever suffering.

Five Truths, Five Obstructions

A Stargazer who truly knows the Two Precepts will be then made to know the Five Truths of our tribe, and beyond them, the Five Obstructions that stand in our way of accepting truth.

The first truth, the most important truth, is *duty*. Some call this *dharma*, and others still call this the *Gaiadharma*, for our one single duty is meant for Gaia. We were given to this world by the Jade Emperor, we are his gift to his wife to protect her creation, and that creation is Gaia. Gaia is surrounded by the warring forces of Reality, Passion, and Darkness, and when these three forces are in balance, there is no worry. But long they have been imbalanced, and so the first precept is made true, all life is suffering. Gaia suffers, and we accept this but wish for her to escape such shackles. And so our duty is to her. Anything for Gaia, at any cost. If our duty at that moment is to sit upon an outcropping and look to the stars for a vision from Chimera, then that is how it is. If our duty is to take our natural gifts of claws and teeth and to rend the enemy to ribbons upon the battlefield of Gaia's flesh, then that too is how it is. Provided we do our duty with an eye toward moderation, we will be fulfilling the first truth.

That which hindrances our adherence to duty is *lethargy*. We may grow tired of our duty, weary and indolent in the certainty that we are doing no good. This may lead us into *Shadow*, called Harano by some, and from there it is near to impossible to escape. This is a problem of our tribe, perhaps the biggest hindrance to the most important truth.

The second truth is *restraint*. This is exemplified in the Middle Way, for it is critical that we have total self-possession. But it is important, for all of us are born with a core of fire within us called Rage. Rage, like fire, is almost uncontrollable. How does one manage to contain fickle flame? You cannot grab it, though you may smother it. However, contrary to what many may tell you, Rage is not a bad thing. Rage is a powerful tool allowing us to spill blood when needed. Surely that causes question? Let me clarify. The truth of restraint does not imply that we abstain. We do not reject out-of-hand, we must only accept things with great moderation. Rage is no different. Many confuse Rage with anger, but anger is a negative thought that only increases suffering. Rage is a weapon that can, from time to time, be loosed from its cage. There is an appropriate time for us to wield it, and therein lies another crucial distinction. We must wield it; it must never wield us. If it does, we know we are in spiritual disarray and have accepted anger.

That which hinders restraint is *desire*. We must never desire. We are allowed to want, but to desire is something bigger, something worse. Desire can rule us. The desire for gratification in the form of pain or pleasure damages us. We may desire to destroy. Or we may desire the opposite, to never take life and to never destroy. These are extreme ways, and not useful when seeking true restraint. It removes us from the Middle Way.

The third truth is *wisdom*. We are not perfect beings, though we strive to be, and perfection is allowed only through wisdom. Wisdom is nothing short of an attempt to understand all things. We know that we may never truly achieve that, but our attempt arms us with weapons to use when performing our duty. Wisdom is more important than Honor or Glory, which are useful only in the proving ourselves worthy to the spirits who guide us.

Doubt is what hinders wisdom. It is healthy to question, but never to be skeptical and doubt. Too much doubt overrules wisdom, and suddenly you find yourself asking, *Am I doing the wrong thing? Have I learned poorly?* It causes hesitation. It creates a hiccup in the wisdom-gathering quest, and any separation from that quest is dangerous.

The fourth truth is *tranquility*. Tranquility is a state of mind, a state of being, and a place in and of itself. It is located not in the past or the future, but in the present. Here we do not dwell on the negative energies of our failures or the pressing horrors of the future. We lose all for the present and here we are able to reach new wisdom in the quest for better performing our duty. If an arrow flies true, the past and future matter not, all that matters is the arrow in the present. Tranquility is best discovered through personal meditation. Some meditate with the very practice that earned us our name. Looking up at the night sky, our ancestors would clear their minds and simply stare at the stars, sometimes doing little more than reciting constellations (new and old) over and over again in their mind like a mantra. Others would do so in the Mirror Lands and wait until the stars themselves would speak with hidden truths. Some do not gaze upon the luminous heavens and instead engage in other practices to find tranquility. I know many that engage in meditative tea ceremonies, doing little more than sitting in silence, sipping tea in ritual practice with an empty mind. Tranquility is key.

Opposing tranquility is *worry*. What function does worry carry out except to block us from tranquility? Worry doesn't solve problems. It only agitates and creates internal suffering. Tranquility frees our mind so it may travel to new wisdom, but worry locks our mind down so it is trapped and unable to learn.

The fifth and final truth is that of *vigor*. We tell all our cubs to engage in "armorlike vigor," meaning that their quests must not be deviated from. We know that we have great duty, and vigor is defined as the fortitude to continue on our duty without stopping. It is the fortitude of action. It is the act of effort, of working ceaselessly to achieve a goal. You cannot anticipate failure before it happens, because if you do, you have already failed. (And this is where tranquility helps clear our minds to make way for our armorlike vigor.) We must always continue. We must never stop in our duty. If we do, Gaia will continue to suffer, and with this birth of the Sixth Age, that suffering may overwhelm her and destroy us all.

Finally, that which blocks our vigor is *overconfidence*. We are allowed to be satisfied in our work and accomplishments; in fact, it is recommended that we understand when we have succeeded in some small part. But one success in battle does not mean the war is over. Overconfidence breeds our vigor. If we are so sure of ourselves, we may stop trying to overcome suffering and may fall from the Middle Way. Then our duty to Gaia is weakened, and that mustn't happen.

Have any of us ever mastered all Five Truths? No. And there is a reason.

The Heart of Enlightenment

Bodhichitta is the heart of enlightenment. It is the culmination of all our teachings, the achievement of perfection. And we must never reach it.

This world is locked in suffering. This is a constant cycle that all living things are bound to. We may die, but in dying, nobody is truly free. Our soul is simply regurgitated back into suffering so that we may attempt again to become perfect beings. We continue to return again and again, our souls redressed in different incarnations. This is why we have a stronger connection to our ancestors than other tribes. This is why we place shrines to them and are able to speak with them more freely than others, because we have been given another part of the truth, and that truth is the dynamic rebirth that suffering creates. As enlightened beings, Stargazers have the chance to become so perfect that we free ourselves from suffering, stop being reborn, and are allowed to become a true part of Gaia.

But we mustn't. Not ever.

That is not why we're here. We have made a promise, a formal commitment. The enlightenment of others is a thousandfold more important than our own individual escape from suffering. And above all others is Gaia. Until she is saved, we are locked here by compact and oath. We strive for perfection, but we must not hurry. As Stargazers, we follow the Middle Way, postponing our own enlightenment so that we may guide others and guide Gaia off of the cycle of suffering that has ensnared us all. We take lives. There is blood forever dried beneath our claws. We are beasts balanced with men and there is a war raging all around us as the three forces of Reality, Passion, and Darkness strive to crush Gaia with their struggling. We would love to be spirits like you, but we're unable. All life is

suffering, and we have a duty to Gaia to free her before we may free ourselves. Such is our Way.

Camps

Even a tribe such as the Stargazers is fractured, split into fragments that only catch part of the mirrored whole. Some of these so-called "camps" are good, others bad. Those that are good are simply tribe members gathering together for a specialized purpose, focusing on a single Gaia-given task. Those that are bad collect away from the tribe in a spirit of divisiveness and collapse. Certainly none expect total agreement, but to chop and dice our tribe up into tiny little pieces does us no good. It only weakens us in this time when we need strength. It waters down our power, it muddles our vision. I only hope that when we are witness to our mother's final screams, we are either capable of acting in unison or accepting our grand failure.

Ana-gamin

First, the Ana-gamin, or the "Non-Returners." I could find none, for reasons that will become obvious soon enough, so I did as best as I could. I found a Silent Strider called Matthew Ever-Finding, who traversed the Umbra with his pack in an effort to help chart some of the uncharted celestial roads. Open your ears, spirits, and hear:

One of my packmates was a 'Gazer. Name of Mei-Lin Mistchaser. Beautiful girl. A little wacky. Loved her like a sister. She had this uncanny knack of finding new ways out of bad situations. It was like she was born for the fuckin' Umbra, seriously. Well, one day she and I were scouting ahead, doing it simple and easy, hanging out in the Near Umbra, no big deal. Suddenly, out of this spirit lake comes five Crinos Garou, all dolled up in blue paint and orange robes, right? I laughed, but Mei seemed transfixed. They called to her, and she went. I went, too, mostly to point and laugh and maybe piss on their feet, but as soon as I got within ten feet, one raised a hand and I goddamn *froze*. Couldn't move. Mei wobbled and waved like a hypnotized snake. They told her that they were the Anna-gammin or whatever, the Non-Returners. That they were Stargazers like she was, and that they had forsaken the Gaiadharma, for that was nothing but a "Wheel of Chains" or some nonsense. They started babbling some bullshit about *samsara* and suffering and other claptrap, and then they started explaining that someday soon, *all* the Stargazers would go to the Umbra, deep into the heavens, and never return to the Earth. I was like, "Holy crap, that's incredibly stupid, right, Mei?" But before I knew it, she was holding their hands and they were all going into the water together. In moments, the water was over her head, there were a few ripples, and then she was gone.

I couldn't move for about another hour. I finally got free, didn't even bother going back to the rest of the pack, and I tried to track her. I went into that lake, talked to spirits, caught her scent, and went for it. It was the hardest thing I've ever done. You know how easy it is to find someone in the Umbra who doesn't want to be found? It's like trying to find a single cat's eye marble in the Atlantic-fucking-Ocean. And it didn't matter anyway. Because the trail, tenuous as it was, disappeared into *nothing-nada-nichts* as soon as I hit the Deep Umbra. There I am, surrounded by stars, ghosts and spirits sliding through the darkness way off in the distance, and Mei was game over, gone. I've never felt more alone. We lost a good packmate that day. I don't know what these Non-Returning prickholes think they're up to, but if I ever find them, I'm going to kick their teeth in for putting that bad *gris-gris* on Mei-Lin and stealing one of Gaia's best.

The Sacred Thread

Listen now to the words of Giratha Three-Debt, the warrior-sage of the group known as the Sacred Thread, and he will tell you of their ways and purpose:

The world continues to slip. The slope carries us perpetually downward, and has grown dangerously slick. The quality of reality and the spiritual merits of reality's inhabitants are declining rapidly, and if action is not taken, what will be left of this place? Ethics of the mind, body, and soul will be lost forever, and the world will be nothing more than a slaughter pit of depravity, and then the Wyrm will truly have won.

Garou are concerned with Garou. They are bound up in the serpentine coils of politics, sept business, tribal ritual. It's all wasted time. As the werewolves play their puppy games, Gaia's grip grows weaker, and the Wyrm's grows stronger. This place is made for Gaia's greatest child, the human, and it is in the human heart that the battle for all the souls will be fought. This is where the Wyrm lives, in the hearts and minds of man, and so that is the battlefield of the Sacred Thread.

We are *ksatriyas*, warriors and priests, but more importantly, teachers. We are everywhere. Our kind goes to the darkest hearts of native populations, and to the most crowded urban tangles. The subjects of our scrutiny are men and women, *mortals*, who need our shepherding ways. We are instructors, first and foremost. We become professors, counselors, trainers, and we deliver into human hands the ways for them to obtain some kind of purity within themselves. It doesn't matter what we teach; education of any kind can sanitize the spirit, whether we're tutoring them history or coaching them through martial *katas*. When we need to, we also protect our students.

If they are in danger of physical attack or mystical assault, we stand in the way of harm so that they may continue on their paths to sanctity. And finally, if it should come to it (and we pray it never does), if one of our children goes astray and chooses the dark roads leading inward to the Wyrm — then those children must be destroyed. That is our saddest and most serious task. Corruption cannot be abided.

You will know us by the thread that binds our long hair behind us. Each *ksatriya* of the Sacred Thread makes her own cord. It is ninety-six times the breadth of the four fingers of the maker, and each of the four fingers represents the greatest stages of man's consciousness — *waking, dreaming, dreamless sleep*, and the *formless void*. The maker also colors the cord in thirds, each color representing the three forces that struggle for dominance over Gaia. Black for Reality, Red for Passion, and White for Darkness. You will see us with our mortal students, our hair bound up with our sacred threads, and you will see that our task of bringing men to enlightenment is the right one. We will persevere. The Garou Nation does not interest us, nor does the whims and wishes of the Beast Court. We are only concerned with the predominance of quality in the soul of all mankind.

The Zephyr

As our days lessen, so do the number of Stargazers willing to sit aside in their caerns and ponder the esoteric mysteries. Some of these Garou, seeking action over inertia, choose to join the Zephyr. Jack the Moon-Blessed tells you of the ways of this camp:

There's a part of the Mahabarata which is the Bhagavad-Gita, and it's a story that I've always considered important. There is a warrior, Arjuna, who must go to battle at Kurukshetra. But before the battle, he demands that his charioteer (who just so happens to be Krishna the avatar) drive him down the center of the battlefield, where he may gaze upon both sides of the assembled soldiers. Among the faces of these gathered warriors, he recognizes too many. Fathers, sons, brothers, cousins, friends. He knows many of these people, has sat with them, talked with them, dined with them at their homes and they at his. And he weeps. He decides he can't go to battle. He can't encourage all these people that he potentially knows and loves to destroy one another senselessly. But Krishna has something to say about that. The charioteer explains to Arjuna: *Your duty is to be a warrior. This is the way things are, you can't go against them. You must kill your enemies, and not stop until all the necessary killing is done.*

We are Garou, and whether we belong in the West among the Sunset People or whether we stay in the East among the Beast Courts, you can't deny the fact that we are warriors, through-and-through. We are capable of many things, it's true. Song, philosophy, poetry, dance. But we're *built* for war. We're given bodies that withstand tremendous pain. We have claws and teeth that are capable of reducing Wyrmflesh into little more than unrecognizable gobbets of stinking meat. Our howls inspire us to battle, our forms allow us maximum liquidity in the theatre of war. There are many skills that help us in our duties, and those we learn with attentiveness and discipline. Some learn to dance with klaives, others follow the martial ways of ancestor Kai Lin.

Of course, we're not senseless murderers. We have minds made to contemplate what we are meant to do and what we have done. Our spirits and ancestors lend us a chorus of voices to give meaning to our duty. Our duty is not to stand idly by. It is to enter the turmoil, never to emerge. We go everywhere, wherever we must, wherever the battle is. If there is a great caern besieged by the Wyrm, then that's where we'll be. If an ancient spirit requires our protection, then so be it. We get in, do our duty, and then we move on. We risk no social entanglements, we don't partake in moots unless absolutely necessary. There is one purpose, and that purpose is war.

Has Shigalu taught us nothing? We are overwhelmed and encircled by the forces of Darkness. Do we think that mild contemplation will help cure the limitless plagues that sicken Gaia's soul? Was the Snow Leopard saved by watching from the periphery? We should've been there, all of us, in defense of our holiest of places — but we weren't. We'll never fail that way again. We will succeed, or die trying.

Trance Runners

I have myself seen a Trance Runner once. Truly quite a sight! They are rare, and I doubt that they are written of anywhere in the great spirit records. Let us correct that mistake and enter them into the Jade Record. Hear about them now from the Hakken Garou, Kumono Cloud-Rift:

I was waiting for a message from the Court at Roppuku Station. I won't bore you with the details of the message, but the message was crucial, meant to name the museum in Tokyo containing a fetish that had been considered lost to my ancestors too many years ago. I was offshore, on a cargo freighter, waiting in the shadows for someone to deliver the message at the appointed time. I didn't expect them to hold to their word; they had named a time too quick, too soon. No one could make it to me with such alarming alacrity.

Then I took a casual glance toward the docks, and I saw something on the quarter-mile stretch of

water separating the boat and the mainland. Some*one*, actually. Running. Across the water. The figure was moving fast, really fast, and they hit the tow-rope running. The individual half-danced, half-shimmied up the rope like they were a hollow-boned otter. I could see by now, even in the half-darkness of the city-wash lights, that the figure was a man, and he leapt up upon the boat, barely standing on two toes. Then he began leaping from box to box toward me, making no noise, moving like a quiet little cricket. I didn't know if I should worry or not so I drew claws, but by the time they tasted air, the runner was directly in front of me, balanced like a crane on the very edge of a plastic barrel.

The figure was thin, bird-thin, little more than a skeleton woven with tight muscle. He was also completely naked. Then he handed me a tube with a scroll in it that named the museum. I was floored. I named him Silent Strider, but he clucked his tongue at me, and in *Tibetan* told me that he was a Stargazer, and belonged to an ancient tradition of his tribe called the "*lung-gom-pa*," or the Trance Runners. In whispers, he gave me a quick lesson. Told me that they numbered few, but were all over. They transmitted messages, items, secrets from caern to caern, court to court. He said through much meditation of his *dharma* he was able to achieve near-weightlessness when so desired, and then did this trick. He dropped down on top of the barrel, sitting in a pretzel-knot lotus position. Then he jumped three feet in the air. Didn't undo his legs, either. I don't know how he did it; when I asked, he just chuckled, and said that I "should really see the Seven Mile Leap." Then he took off, running. I've never heard of them before, and haven't seen one since.

The Heavenly Successors of the Demon-Eater

Many who know about this group have labeled them an "Apocalypse Cult," being focused too much about the end and not enough about the present. I haven't found this to be true, and it's possible that they are merely victims of bad press. But I will let another tell the tale. Here is one of the Successors (also called Demon-Eaters), Yao Jun, the Magistrate of the Winds:

Once, a very long time ago, there was a Stargazer that was given the task of protecting the emperor of China, who was said to possess a slumbering vein of our blood running through his heart. The Stargazer was filled with woe and worry, and felt that he was not righteous or just enough to handle the duty. He believed the only way out of this, and the only way to allow someone better to do the job, was to commit suicide, which he did on the steps of the imperial palace. His cooling body was discovered by the emperor himself, who was being brought out to attend a tea ceremony with the extended imperial family. Upon discovering the corpse, the emperor did not treat it with ignominy as he should have, but instead had the body buried ceremoniously in one of the green robes reserved for members of the royal family.

The Stargazer's spirit was not to be reborn immediately, and instead traveled through the thousand hells, pondering his duty. He knew what the emperor had done and vowed to return to the family to protect them. He battled through these hells and gathered 3000 warriors, and when he was finally freed, he was not alive, but a spirit — as was his contingent of soldiers. They found that it was a thousand years later, and the current imperial palace was besieged by an ancient demon who called itself Desolation. With his warriors, the Stargazer defeated Desolation and saved the family, and then vowed to defeat all demons, everywhere. The spirits all dissipated and were later reborn. That Stargazer's name was Zhong Kui, and we are the spirits that were reborn.

We are Zhong Kui's successors. Our task at hand is to defeat and destroy the demons who drink Gaia's soul like hungry tumors. Demons have always been here, quiet, whispering, but now their numbers grow, and they have ceased being quiet. We are warriors and exorcists from the Tibetan traditions, but we come from everywhere. We *are* everywhere. If we are not in battle with a demon, you will not know us. We are secret. We may be in the packs of other Stargazers, other Garou, or part of a random sentai. We may call upon you spirits or train an apprentice or take solace at a local caern. But you will still not know us. Should we find the scent of a demon, and should it engage us in battle, however... then you will know us. Then we don our green robes like Zhong Kui was given, and we attack with our *phurba* spirit daggers in an effort to sever the cruel demon from the flesh of the innocent. Those who are born to us will not know it, but we come for them over time. And we show them the truth, for the truth is impossible to deny.

The demons are coming. Their ranks swell like great bulges of pus and blood, and we are the hot blade meant to lance such a blister. Others say we fight the wrong enemy, but has no one noticed how grossly these things stink of the Wyrm? Others say we are too focused on the End Times, but if these ancient reborn monsters aren't an indication of the final Apocalypse, what could they be? The battlefield grows muddy with blood. The skies are raining sickness. And demons again walk the earth, unshackled, unfettered, and unrelenting. That is why we, the Demon Eaters, must remain vigilant. We must succeed.

Where is the Klaital Puk?

Klaital, one of the ancient progenitors of the Stargazers, has been lost. His soul cannot be found among any of the Stargazers, and all efforts expended on the search have come up with more questions than answers. During the spiritual nightmare in Bangladesh in 1999, the most current believed incarnation of the lost hero, Ayjis Artaq, disappeared and has yet to be found. His pack believed him dead, as did the rest of the Klaital Puk camp. But where was the next incarnation of Klaital? The spirits were unable (or unwilling) to give information. Other groups, specifically the Ana-Gamin, claimed that his incarnate walked among them, and thus their will should be followed. Some Stargazers believe that Ayjis Artaq is still alive (and the incarnation of Klaital with him), and others believe that Klaital's reincarnation is being held until the "official" end of the Last Days. On the opposite end of the spectrum, some more doomsaying Stargazers opine that the Last Days *are* here, and that is why Klaital hasn't emerged. Regardless of the nature of the belief surrounding Klaital, one thing can be agreed upon — the absence of his incarnation is a bad portent, indeed.

Ouroboroans

The last we shall speak of are the Ouroboroans. Have these brothers fallen too far from the tree, or have they instead stumbled upon a secret mission that will truly help save the heart of Gaia? I am not the final arbiter of such things. To tell you of their dark pursuit, here is the voice of Vishram Shadow's Son, a Theurge of the Stargazers:

Hear that? It's faint. Like a susurration of dry leaves. Or the chittering of insect mandibles. Do you feel it? Do you feel constricted, bound up in a grim embrace, smothered and strangled and choked? The Queen Spider wraps us all up in her iron cords; there isn't a single one of us *not* caught up in her gross entanglements! But there is one who is caught up greater than all of us, one who's buried deep in the catacomb heart of spider's silk, unable to see the light, unable to be truly *free* as he needs to be. I speak of the great spirit most of you know as the Wyrm, but as we call Ouroborous, the *Balancer*.

Think about it! Open your mind and cease denial. The Wyrm was a creature of balance, and what are we, the Stargazers? We are also beasts of balance! This poor broken spirit is our true totem, our true father. If you were trapped against your will for countless millennia, wouldn't you go mad? Wouldn't you slash at your bonds and threaten your captors with bile and acid? The Wyrm is not the danger. Yes, we've been told that,

but it's a lie propagated by the Queen Spider herself. Will you buy into the untruth? Will you fall down her trapdoor like so many others have? Or will you help us, will you see that our mission to *free* the Wyrm is the only righteous quest?

Most come to us through bouts of darkness. Only when you reach the bottom of your very soul are your eyes capable of adjusting to the reality of things. Some of us have been lost on sojourns in the bowels of the Abyss, others still have floundered in the throes of Harano or have been so close to death that they could see its *eyes*. When we skirted true darkness, realization dawned upon us like a light and our true undertaking was granted to us like a gift. There are two steps to our task. The first is to know the Balancer, which many of us have done in earnest. Some drink the blood of Banes to taste of corruption so that they may know it. Others have spent time in the bowels of Black Spiral hives, learning the Gospel of Balance. But we all have some stain on our hearts, because as the theory goes, how can one know Good if they haven't yet tasted Evil?

The next step is freedom! Find the Wyrm and free it however possible. We learn complex rituals of purity that other Garou couldn't bear to learn, and we perform them on those we deem worthy of freedom. Banes can be cleansed, if you work hard enough, did you know that? Probably not. Others, too. Men with the Balancer in their hearts must have everything taken away from them. Their homes, their precious television sets, their loved ones, their jobs. Take all things that stink of Queen Spider away and then we can begin work on disinfecting their broken souls. Even Black Spirals can be saved! Just last month I liberated one of these poor, deluded creatures. I kidnapped it and brought it to the tunnels below the city, and there I taught it the pain of its master. I removed its skin, its teeth, its fingers, all while the poor Dancer was bound up by silver cord, symbolizing the paralyzed nature of the Balancer. In the end, the Dancer could not be cleansed, and sometimes the only way to true freedom is destruction, so I ate its heart. Such is the way.

All should join us. All should come to us to seek the light. A wise man, which may have been me, once said: *The only true way to fix something is to break it.* We will free the Balancer. We will fix it and restore the great spirit to its rightful prominence. And those who stand in our way will be punished.

Breeds and Auspices

Whose voice returns to us now? It is Peter Wu, whose duty has been to learn all he can about our tribe. He will inform the Jade Record with the truths regarding the separations intrinsic to us all:

Homid

I hate to state the obvious, but the majority of our dwindling tribe members were born from human stock. And why wouldn't they be? Let's go over the statistics. Most of our tribe hails from one of two places — either China or India. These two places account for a staggering majority of the entire world population. Furthermore, the people in these countries tend to maintain belief systems that are closer than most to our own precepts and teachings. As such, it makes for a very large, potentially enlightened breeding pool.

One stipulation exists, however. We are adherents to the Middle Way. All things in moderation. Restraint is a necessary part of all of our tribe, and without it one could argue that we wouldn't be separate from the rest and would be an entirely different creature altogether. And, as we are taught, desire is the wall that blocks us from performing the restraint needed. But here's the problem — simply because it is taught doesn't mean it's truly understood. Desire, among many of our tribe, is far too often equated with sexual activity, and worse, sexual pleasure. Sex comes from desire, or so it's believed, and so many Stargazers simply perform restraint in their dealings with sex.

Simply put, *we're not breeding.* At least, not like we should. Obviously, we're being born, but not in staggering numbers. The problem with the logic that prevents such coupling is that desire is absolutely *not* to be equated with sexual contact. Desire is the overindulgence of want, but sexual contact is one of our pure practices, as pure as meditation or doing our bloody duty in the name of Gaia. Few are able to get past this, worrying about the shame they'll feel and the damage that their enlightenment will take in the process. And so, our numbers even among human stock dwindle.

Metis

Eastern culture is not always so accepting of the different, or worse, the deformed. Asian society is a beautiful thing, and it moves like the tides and is allowed its own keen brand of individualism; yet, at the same time, a certain uniformity is expected and desired. Anything outside that norm falls to disdain due to the discomfort caused, and if there is ever a group that falls outside the norm (well, arguably less and less so in these modern days), it's the half-breed metis.

It's a simple fact: Metis are born. It's never on purpose, it's never desired, but it happens. Now, most of our tribe is overtly concerned with restraint or, as I've said, total self-denial in many things, and one of those things is breeding. Hence, not many metis are spawned among our numbers, for it brings great shame. One wishes that we wouldn't feel such shame

for one another, especially regarding something like this which is particularly sensitive, but we do. Breeding a metis cub implies severe weakness, inferring a spiritual breach of the moderate or ascetic paths many of our tribe follow.

However, shame may be reserved for the parentage of such a cub, but the shame is ideally never carried over to the cub herself. Metis are still Garou and not to be spurned. Of course, some of that disdain Asian culture has for such deformities may carry over to some of our tribe, but all in all we are a large extended family who is capable of overwhelming compassion. The metis deserve our empathy, not our derision or disregard. And nine times out of ten, they receive the empathy they deserve.

Metis, you see, are often explained as Garou who physically manifest the Middle Way. The thinking on this is clear, though the practice is a bit muddled. The thinking is simply that, metis are the balance between the two breeds. We are all amalgamations of man and beast, but the two dominant breeds create something of an imbalance, a reliance upon one breed or another. But metis? Metis are both, equally, half-and-half. Plus, metis have a far easier time learning our first two precepts. Because of their physically deformed nature, they come to understand that suffering is the predominant force in the universe very quickly. And their genetic heritage gives them a leg up on accepting the Middle Way, as well. For this, many of our strongest learners (and hence, teachers) have been metis.

One more item deserves note, here: Metis may not be born too often among our numbers, but they are among other tribes. When they're cast away (and they inevitably are), the Stargazers have a strong policy of adopting those wayward Garou.

Lupus

The math here is hard to deny. There are very few wolves left in the world. They're dying out, making the endangered lists in every corner of the world. They are hunted, poisoned, sickened, or merely hedged in by the encroaching world of humans, and they suffer mightily. The numbers of wolves in the world are few, and then consider that the numbers of our tribe among the Garou are few as well, and how does that add up? It shows, quite clearly, that our population of wolf-bred Stargazers is frighteningly slim.

That's not to say they don't exist, of course. Some of our kind have bred with the rare Tibetan black wolves, and in Mongolia our lupus numbers are stronger than they have ever been, as there exists a stable base of the Eurasian subspecies of wolf. Once, we also had strong numbers in India. Only ten years ago, the government began protecting the numbers of the Indian Wolf, a smaller subspecies of wolf, but things have changed again in the last few years. A number of Black Spiral Dancers have begun stealing children by the riverside, and these stories have made it into the newspapers. Once again, men fear wolves in India, and despite the government decree, they hunt them ruthlessly.

I've heard something of an urban legend about a pack of lupus Stargazers that remains in Tibet and China. I say "urban legend" because it appears that no one can directly confirm a primary source that has dealt with this pack, only the "friend of a packmate" category of tertiary source. I've heard this pack given many names, but there is only one name for the pack alpha: *Mother's Whispers*. From what's been said, this alpha received "direct communication" from the Emerald Mother herself, and was sent upon a quest for many years into the deep mists of the Mirror Lands. From there, it's said that Mother's Whispers was able to literally track down the heart of the universe, where the Weaver had bound up the Wyrm in her webs, and the pack was able to hear the Wyrm whimpering like a kicked whelp. Now, the pack is something of a legend in their worldly attacks on the Weaver's webs. They attack Chinese soldiers out on maneuvers, they destroy trucks and convoys, and have even infiltrated whole factories only to leave them decimated and without a single worker left alive. They claim to do this in the name of "balance" and "duty." Some even cite them as the best candidates to retake Shigalu. I don't even believe they exist, myself. Sounds too much like wish fulfillment for those who want to deviate from the Middle Way. But perhaps it's true. Perhaps.

Ragabash

In India, the No-Moons are called either the "Hungry Moons" or the "Stomach Moons," for they are equated with trickster spirits, and tricksters stumble upon wisdom only through the guidance of their hungry bellies. In China, the Ragabash are not so much called anything directly, but there is a term directly associated with them: *Wu-K'ung*. Ultimately, this translates to something like, "Awake to Emptiness" and is considered to be the predominant command among the Ragabash of our tribe.

What does this mean? I've been told a story by many Stargazer No-Moons that involves a member of our tribe called the "Monkey King." The Monkey King was jealous of an ancient sage of the tribe who held an ornately carved wooden box, and inside the box was said to be the Elixir of the Nine Moons, a potion created of the Peaches of Immortality and was said to grant eternal life and perpetual enlightenment. Mon-

key, as we'll call him, was not interested in someone else having this; he himself wanted it. And so he snuck out and slid through the Mirror Lands in all forms and finally managed to thieve the box away from the old sage. Monkey opened the box right then and there, not bothering to wait till he had time to sneak away, and quaffed the Elixir immediately. He tasted the fermented tang of the peaches, and then his mind began breaking into little pieces as he threw up the contents of the elixir back in the bottle from whence it came. Monkey collapsed there, and found that he couldn't remember his name or where he'd come from, only that he had consumed the Elixir. The sage found him, and smiled down, and said, "You have swallowed the Elixir and now you have nothing. *Now* you are immortal and enlightened."

That's the story. I don't properly understand it, but I presume that it implies an unconventional tranquility as espoused by the No-Moons of our tribe. Some of the meditation these Ragabash engage in would make even the weirdest Zen masters stare on quite curiously. They do anything for that "short, sharp shock" of *satori*, I've found.

Theurge

Stargazers under the crescent moon are perhaps the most in danger of reaching a state of imbalance — yes, even more so than our Ahroun brothers and sisters. But why is this?

Consider this. Theurges (known by some as the "Ghost Moons," for they speak to the spirits of all things) are responsible for our tribe's greatest enigmas. They are the keepers of lore, the cataloguers of all our ancient magic, and they are the mouthpieces that communicate with the life that exists beyond us and into the Mirror Lands. All of these things are like puzzle boxes housing the deepest, darkest riddles buried beneath countless layers of questions without answers. Sometimes, one of our Ghost Moons will find one of these enigmas and latch onto it like a mosquito seeking blood, but they'll be unable to drink their fill. They will keep going and going, peeling away layer upon layer of the puzzle and never truly growing closer to finding the solution. It destroys their minds. Many of them go away to live apart from the tribe — we call these the *Sennin*. They disappear from us, some traveling to regions of the world that are yet unvisited, and others vanish into the Umbra, never to be seen again (though it's rumored that the strange camp called the "Non-Returners" find the tribe members who delve too deep into the Umbra and force them into the fold).

And it is a shame that their position offers up the grim possibility that their minds will be lost. They are one of our most valued assets. Not to say they are more important than any other, but their task is perhaps more daunting and less clear than any other, and for that I don't envy them. However, even if they do lose their minds... just ask the Hungry Moons, for sometimes there is great wisdom in madness.

Philodox

Under the half moon, our teachers are born. Some call them the "Two-Handed Moons" because in two hands one can measure a fair balance of things. In both China and Japan, we Philodox are said to be born under the "Moon of the Void," for in the void there is nothing. And only in the true space of nothing can one honestly find virtue and balance.

Whatever we're called, we are considered to be the judges, sages, and scholars of our tribe. It's up to us to learn the histories of this world and our place in it, and to define how the balance of all things should be placed out. There are two auspices before us and two after us; even our moon is *half*, sitting squarely in the middle and exemplifying perfect balance. The wisdom we uncover and the judgments we decide upon are then passed down to both young and old. It's our voice that's heard first, because we are respected in our position of equilibrium.

Even so, sometimes our striving for such balance deadens our emotions. Look to the No-Moons and the Full Moons, and you'll see vibrancy, madness, joy, and sorrow. Look to us, and you'll see a calm veneer, a placid lake unstirred in each eye, and you'll see our greatest asset and our greatest sorrow. We become so used to seeing all sides of a jewel that it becomes harder and harder to appreciate the jewel for its beauty, not just as the single sum of its parts. But it's the way we must be. We can only hope that we still find happiness and sadness together, and that when we do they don't divert us from making the choices and judgments that fall to us to decide.

Galliard

Some call say our Galliards are born under the "Mantra Moon." There are a number of sacred syllables, words, and songs in existence, and those born under the pregnant guise of Luna are presumed to have a more direct channel to these mystical mantras. What are mantras good for? Mantras are built for many purposes, both in history and in reality. They can: Aid in the acquisition of new gifts and rituals, ward away the Wyrm, communicate with spirits, influence the thoughts and actions of others, venerate one's ancestors, frighten the enemy, give confidence to a friend, etcetera. Do all of our Galliards have a carefully-penned list of mantras to choose from in any given situation? Most don't, no. Most don't even think about

mantras when they do what they do; it's predominantly practiced by only a few, elder Stargazers, and most of them are from India.

However, regardless of what the individual Galliard believes, the ancestors still whisper that their duty — whether they recognize it or not – is to sing the secret words to us all. They needn't be aware of it in technical terms, the truth of the Stargazer Galliard is that they are a conduit connected to a universal song, and when they speak or chant or sing or murmur, they connect to that song and deliver unto us a miniscule fraction of it. And even this fraction holds mammoth power.

Another note about our Galliards. There are sacred symbols, similar in purpose to *mantras*, but drawn instead of spoken. There is one sacred to us — or at least, it was. It is a large circle with a smaller circle within, and a small line connecting one point on the little circle with one point on the larger circle. This diagram was said to be tattooed all over the flesh of our first Galliard, Kalyana Seed-of-Song. She put it there, because that symbol represents the existence of the external world and its ways (the outer circle) and the inner life of the individual (the inner circle). The Galliard bridges these two things (the line), connecting them and introducing one to the other so that we may all be enlightened to the truth of all reality.

Ahroun

A brief lesson on linguistics that's worthy of note: In Japanese, the word *yama kaze* is the "mountain wind," and is made up of two characters. When these characters are overlaid atop one another, they merge to make *arashi*, or "hurricane." That is perhaps the essence of our warriors. They are Stargazers, and as such learn the lessons of balance as we all do. But even in their stillness they are rough like a mountain wind, and always in danger of exploding outward like a hurricane. This is why we call them the "Heart Moons" or "Blood Moons" because they are encouraged to act with their hearts. And primal blood rushes through their hearts allowing them great passion and movement — but always they must be wary. For within an Ahroun's heart and blood is that dark line of quicksilver called Rage, and should it make the heart beat too fast or the blood rush too quickly, then the warrior will lose control. He may lose sight of the task at hand, and may cease to understand his own duty. Even in Rage, balance must be maintained.

It's funny. I've met other Garou, and even other Fera who seem to have this image of our Heart Moons as these quiet, meditative types who embrace pacifism and only enter war after great deliberation. And yes, I've met Heart Moons who are like this. But the majority of them understand that there is one thing above all, and that's duty. An Ahroun's duty isn't to sit idly by. The duty of a warrior is to embrace war, for war is one of the actions that creates change. We have other tribe members of other moons to balance this passion out; plenty others are capable of embracing the path of inaction without breaking their obligation. But not our warriors. They have the responsibility to step first upon the battlefield. I remember when I was a young cub, meeting Hoderi Fire-Shine, a Heart Moon of our tribe who worked closely with the Hakken to oust the Wyrm Ghosts from Nippon. He made a sideways comment that he always had "blood staining his teeth" and it wouldn't ever wash off. At first I was appalled and I asked him how he felt about that, and wasn't he going against all that our tribe holds dear? He said one thing to me, and one thing only: "It is what it is." Later I understood. Their undertaking is not one we have to appreciate or even understand. As Hoderi said, *it is what it is*, and we must allow them to do the duty that they were born to.

The Triat

Again, I call upon our departed teacher, Agastya Ten-Arrows. Long had she studied the interplay between these three cosmic forces, and I feel that she best can help you understand our feelings about them so that they may be so placed in the Jade Record:

A Stargazer must know his parentage. At the beginning, before the birth of all tangible and intangible things, three forces struggled for dominance. We must know what they are, how they can help us, how they hurt Gaia, and how we must return them to balance. For these three monarchs have forgotten how to share, and we must teach them again how to become one, not three, and free the Emerald Mother from their anger.

The Wyld

We call this *Passion*, for that is what the Wyld is. The Wyld is not an individual thing in nature such as a tree or a fly. The Wyld *is* nature, strange, beautiful, screaming, insane, and serene. It is no one thing except the fire within all things urging us forever on. Passion is our Rage. Passion is our motivation. It's in our guts and in our heart, not in our mind. There is no pattern to it. Only formless and boundless energy. It was the first of the three.

As Stargazers, we need it, though we must never rely on it. Others may try to disavow such passion, but there are times when it is necessary. When married with our other ways, passion can be wings upon our backs instead of shackles around our ankles.

The Weaver

Parcel out the passion, dice it up into manageable pieces, and there you have the Weaver. We call the Queen Spider's influence by one name: *Reality*. For that is what the Weaver is. And therein lies the promising word: *is*. The word "is" helps us define things. This is that, that is this. In that word you find the Spider, busily working to give depth and breadth to our passions. Reality is not in our stomach or in the chambers of our hearts. Reality is the labyrinth of logic at the center of our minds. Reality was the second of the three.

Reality is not our enemy, though some may think that it is. Without the ways of Reality, we would have no tribes, no names, and would only be cast off into a sea of shapeless chaos. We must protect Reality without ever becoming caught in its webs, for its strands are sticky and ever alluring. When it grows out of control, we toss it into the kiln of Passion and let Reality melt and bubble into its primal ways. But it is a third of the cosmos, and we must accept this truth.

The Wyrm

This great serpent was once *Balance*, but now it is *Darkness*. It's a seed of shadow planted in all our hearts. Once it was an agent of the cosmic mind, seeking to provide a scale with which to balance the other two forces. It moderated them, made sure that they existed in a ratio appropriate to keeping the cosmos in perfect accord. Did Passion's madness inflame it? Or did Reality's webs trap it? It doesn't matter. What matters is that somehow, the force of Balance saw sentience awaken in its slumbering mind, and it became painfully self-aware and desperately selfish. It wanted what the others had, and no longer sought to walk the line of moderation. The Wyrm was once in our hands allowing us to balance, but now it is all throughout the celestial body like a cancer. A seed of shadow planted in the hopes of burying us all beneath the cover of Darkness. It was the third of the three.

As Stargazers, we are Garou, and as Garou, we seek to end the Wyrm's pain. But this is not so easy a task, and not one simply defined. It doesn't involve merely destroying it. Cutting it out only makes it grow, like the heads of a hydra lopped off. No, we ourselves must become what it once was. We are *Balance*. We have assumed the role. We must moderate all the forces, now, we are the equaling hands.

The Mandates

We are no longer of the Garou Nation. We are Garou, yes, but we no longer truly belong to that political body and so their rules aren't sacrosanct to us as they once were. The Litany is still deep in our hearts, but our new code of conduct is that which has been long laid out by the Beast Courts. Hence here I give discussion upon the Mandates of the hengeyokai. One of our kind has long lived among the Beast Courts, however informally, and he is well-suited toward explaining the Mandates in the light of our tribe. Listen to the blind scholar, Star-Trail-in-Night-Eyes:

Shirk Not the Tasks Which Have Been Given to You

This tenet isn't one that will be hard for us to adapt to. We are all familiar with the concepts of duty and purpose. The other Garou, *pfeh*, they know duty like they know wisdom, and that's to say not at all. They'd rather sniff each other's tails and pin medals of renown on one another instead of adhering to the responsibility that they were built for. The Jade Emperor didn't give us our tasks just so we could ignore them and do our own selfish little things, did he? No. We have *dharma*, and we will fulfill it. Plain and simple.

What is not so plain and simple, however, is how the Beast Courts view this idea. Mostly, you'll find that they are accepting of the way we choose to realize our tasks, but from time to time you'll find a regent who believes that what we consider to be duty they consider to be a waste of time. At that point, expect to have quite the fight on your hands. But we're used to defending ourselves from others, are we not? At least it's not as bad as in the West.

Guard the Wheel That It May Turn in Fullness

Again, another item that gleefully separates us from our Western "brothers" (dare I call them that?). Most Garou wouldn't know the concept of a Wheel or turning Ages from the hole that lies beneath their tails, but we of the Beast Courts are quite crisp regarding the notion. Ages are born, they turn, and they die, and the Wheel turns like the hands of a clock to another Age. We have heard the recent click-click-clicking and witnessed another Age born, an Age of Sorrow that may be the last stretch of time we are allowed to see. Many of the Courts, including those of our tribe, wish to keep the Wheel turning and to stop it from collapsing in on itself.

But I have met others — and I myself can only wonder if they're right — that believe perhaps the Age of Sorrow is *meant* to be the last. Suffering is the guiding principle of this universe, is it not? And sorrow could be a synonym for suffering, or at least a consequence thereof, true? Our goal is to untie the ropes that fasten Gaia to the Wheel, and maybe if the Ages end, we have truly succeeded in our goal? I'm of course not suggesting that we attempt to destroy the Wheel or Gaia, I'm merely offering an opposing point, is all...

Presume Not To Instruct Your Cousin In His Task

The point of this is obvious. We all have work to do, our tasks are our own, and we mustn't take time away from our own business to blindly, *ahem*, teach others things that we ourselves probably don't understand to begin with. At its root, this is a good idea. The Garou never understood this, did they? No, no, they're hell-bound to bully everyone into doing what they think is right, which is of course one of the reasons we never really got along with those ingrates.

However, time to be the opposing advocate once more. Sometimes, "your cousin" has stepped so far off the path that he's about two pawprints away from toppling into the Abyss, so what do you do? Let the dumb fool learn the lesson the hard (and possibly permanent) way, or do you casually *suggest* to them that maybe, perhaps they're doing a very stupid thing? Sometimes it's necessary to instruct your cousin, see? Also, our mentor-student bond is built on that very concept. The idea, however, that I'd espouse is this — presume not to instruct your cousin unless they wish or need such instruction. Don't over-step your bounds, but cubs still have many lessons to learn.

Honor Your Territory in All Things

We all are given to territorial instincts. It only makes sense, for we are the sum of territorial humans and territorial beasts. And it would be foolish to ignore such instincts, as they are scribed upon our very beings. In practice, it's best not to go nosing around some Nezumi's rat-warren or dancing on anybody's bawn if you don't belong there.

But honestly, we need to be above such pettiness, and I'm amazed that the Beast Courts — ostensibly wiser than the Garou — hold fast to such an outmoded idea. Gaia is a broad expanse and she is the duty of all of us, and lines of territory only create lines on the battlefield. It's pragmatic to practice this so you don't get your nose bitten off, but in theory I find that it's pandering to a not-so-moderate way.

Let Mercy Guide You In Our August Mother's Court

Here's one I agree with in principle and in practice! Mercy allows us to walk the path of moderation and gives us a bulwark against the Rage that festers inside of us. Rage is useful, yes, okay, fine, I grudgingly accept this fact. But Mercy, ah, this separates us truly from the other Garou (one or two tribes aside). We're all allies here, why clash? Why gnash our teeth and draw claws across friendly throats? I literally watched a Black Fury and a Fenrir go at it in the sewers of Hong Kong, one time. Not only did they cover themselves in filthy water and stinking shit, but she permanently lost an eye and he had an ancestral klaive snapped in two! And why? Because Rage ruled them and Mercy wasn't present. Primitives.

Honor Your Ancestors and Your Elders

We go to great lengths for our ancestors. Even a Stargazer with the weakest of ties to her family will maintain a shrine in her domicile that honors *at least* four generations of antecedent blood. Our shrines are grand affairs, truly. Fetishes, poetry, sketches, locks of hair or fur, and other trappings allow us to have a union with our ancestor-spirits that the other tribes couldn't even conceive of. (I myself have a complete skeleton of one of my forebears, a wise Theurge who was called Ho-chi the Earless.) We hold our previous incarnations with enormous reverence, because we know that these ancestors were able to gain wisdom that we have yet been unable to uncover.

Now, honoring elders is a bit different than honoring ancestors, but we hold to that almost as stridently. Among Stargazers, it is accepted wisdom that your elder has a greater sense of duty than you, and as such has probably obtained unfathomable experience. Respect is accorded. Of course, in the Beast Courts, we're also expected to deliver such honor to the elders there, as well. If only they'd give us the same modicum of respect, then perhaps it would be a little easier to relinquish such honor, but I dare not speak more of this subject for fear of prattling about trivial topics.

Honor the Pacts with the Spirit World

Of course, this one's reasoning is evident. Though shouldn't it say, "Honor all pacts?" If one makes a pact, doesn't that burden you with the duty of not dishonoring it? Why only with spirits?

I know, I know, you yourself are spirits, as Li of the Iron Crutch explained in his appeal to me to explicate the Mandates. I do not mean to demean! Let it be said that the Stargazers know the spirits and the spirit world far better than the other tribes. Put that in your Jade Record, will you? We have tiptoed and pirouetted among the very stars themselves, spoken to the gods living in the bellies of the many realms and planets, and have a vast spider-web of oaths with countless luminous beings such as yourselves! Together, the spirits and the Stargazers have forged many compacts, and we will continue to do so until we expire from this Age. Which, of course, I fear is painfully soon.

War Not Upon Human nor Beast

Absolutely true. The Changing Blood that runs hot in our veins is a balance of beast and man, so we are

not meant to war with either. After all, didn't T'ai-Shen make men and animals out of the very clay body of Gaia? We are all one, plain and simple. This is almost an extension of the Mandate that states that we should have mercy, isn't it? Stargazers do not destroy humans or animals. We teach, we enlighten, we shepherd both to an understanding of suffering, but we never war against them. It's counterproductive and only burdens Gaia further.

However, others aren't so clear on this notion, are they? The tribes of Garou ignore this concept like the elephant in the room. Those Red Talons alone couldn't even speak this Mandate without gagging (and in fact I hear vicious rumor that they partake of human flesh)! Sadly, the Garou Nation isn't the only betrayer of this cause — some of the Beast Courts have made haste to ignore this, as well. Faced with extinction the Khan have begun their wars, and the Tengu are so openly involved with humans that it's impossible for them to have moderation in this regard. I fear for us all, for when the humans learn of us (and they may yet do so), they could shake us from Gaia's flesh like water drops from fingertips.

Let No One or Nothing Violate the Sacred Places

This is an inviolable principle. It cannot be argued. Our sacred places are Gaia's eyes, ears, and heart. At these places we commune with our mother, find tranquility and wisdom to bolster our duty. I believe that when these places fall, it's one more nail in the coffin of the Wheel, and it begins spinning all the more erratically with every place lost to us. We must protect them...

...as Shigalu should've been protected. Oh, don't misunderstand me, spirits! We Stargazers did our part. We're not to blame. Other *hengeyokai* and secret spirits have reported to me grave tidings, and these whispers say that the Wyrm troops that destroyed the sept and caern were shepherded in some small part by Garou of the Shadow Lords and Silver Fangs! Prideful, corrupted beasts! Where were they in helping protect the Snow Leopard Caern? Doesn't one of their own lines of Litany tell them to keep all of Gaia's places safe? *Pfeh!* Look to the Western Garou, and see how they battle over the sacred spots instead of communing to save and protect them. Note how many hearts of Gaia have stopped beating (or now beat only for the Great Centipede) because they have been too concerned with infighting and issues of inconsequential glory. There you'll see that there is a true poison at work in the Garou Nation. The Courts of the *hengeyokai* stand by their homes and their sacred places, and will continue to for as long as we breathe. This duty is *paramount*.

Around the World

Geng Khai is one of our tribe who has done much traveling in his time with Gaia; he and the ancestors within him have made great journeys over many years, and because of that, he has much to tell about the world. I have been to a few places myself, but I am not nearly as qualified as Geng Khai (whose name, though he will not tell you this, means "Clever Egg"). Listen now, as I speak his voice to you, telling you of the world viewed through Stargazer eyes:

Hello, *puen*. You spirits are my friends, are you not? Then I call you *puen*.

So, you want to hear about the nations and places of man through the words of one of our kind? And that "one of our kind" is me? Excellent. I am a brilliant tour guide. I was just saying that the other day to my mentor, a tiger-man called Koi. I said to him, "Koi, I am a brilliant tour guide," and he had no choice but to agree. Let's begin.

The Golden Triangle

I'll start here first, because this is not only where I am from, but also where I have spent much of my time. I was born in Thailand, in a bug-speck collection of shacks called Bin Hin Taek, or the "cracked rock village." Later, when I became what I was and who I was, I had a new home, the Sept of the *Songkran* Maiden, a caern buried deep in the heart of beautiful caves in the Thoed Thai valley. (The *Songkran* is the time when the sun moves from one star sign into the next; the caern was awakened on one of the *Maya Songkran*, or the great day when the sun moves into the new year. The "maiden" of the *Songkran* was the founder of our sept over a thousand years ago, a beautiful Stargazer queen called Heavens-Falling who would make great strides in the early alliances with the Changing Bloods of the Beast Courts. But here I digress, something you'll find I do easily.)

We were a sept of strong warriors and curious questioners. There could be no other way, for living in the Golden Triangle was like setting up camp on the front lines of the battlefield. Here the Wyrm has staked much ground, and squirms around in the very soil. Why is it so dangerous here? Let me explain.

The Golden Triangle is a wild, untamed area that surrounds the nexus point where the corners of Burma, Thailand, and Laos meet. It is in this area that some three-quarters of the opium is grown for the world's heroin. It is a place of mercenaries, drug armies, and total lawlessness hidden deep in the dark shadows of the jungle. Here poor farmers work their knuckles to

the bloody bone to produce the poppy plants that fuel the drug trade, because why grow tomatoes or tobacco when the opium crop brings in ten times the money? Not to mention ten times the addictive properties; if I had 100 *bhat* for every time I met a peasant farmer who was hooked on opium, I would be a very rich fellow, you see? And if it's not heroin, it's *ya ba*, the "mad pill," otherwise known as methamphetamines.

Worse still, much of these illicit narcotic trade is marshaled by an ancient demon who sleeps in a statue of a black dragon. They call him Zhang Sa, and I have encountered (and destroyed) his minions many times. They are festering creatures, only half-living, and the stench of the Wyrm comes off of them in putrid waves.

Some say it is the corrupted presence of this demon that caused the loss of our bear brothers in the region. These bearmen were once great keepers of secret wisdom known as the Wa Brotherhood. They were local tribesmen who passed down ancient lore through whisper and song. But a century ago, which many say coincided with the arrival of the black dragon statue that houses Zhang Sa, the Wa Brotherhood underwent a terrible change. Legend says they were made to walk the spiral and made into ghastly Demon Bears. I've seen them, stalking like shadows in the deep marsh at the very edge of the valley, mud dripping from their diseased hides. Those who have encountered them say that they no longer keep great wisdom, and in fact are unable to remember even what happened the day before. Even stranger, they have apparently divided themselves into two "ideological" camps, if you can dare to call them that! One camp kills humans and takes their heads, but prefers to have them fresh, or "wet." The other camp cuts of heads, but likes to leave them in the sun to turn them "dry." These "wet heads" and "dry heads" battle against one another day after day. It is sad how far the Wa Brotherhood has fallen.

Other problems persist in my volatile homeland. In Burma (now Myanmar), bad companies come to milk Gaia dry of her resources. Trees fall, the rivers run slick with arteries of oil, the beautiful eggshell sky grows dark with choking fumes. And the men that come with these companies exploit the villagers, sometimes raping them or even murdering them for no reason at all. It was one of these evil companies that, fifteen years ago, destroyed our sept and closed off access to our caern's heart with thunderous detonations.

You may think this put my spirit down, that it defeated me. Or instead, it enraged me and pushed me to great violence. It did not. My hope and belief in all things good never waned. We have a saying, and I say this daily to my departed brothers and my still-living friends. I say, *Phu Chi Fah*, or "the mountain always points to the sky." I have always believed that good things will come, even through the bad. And it was proven, for the sept grows again. Many old friends (and many new fellows I have never even met) have reclaimed the area and are making great strides in uncovering the lost heart of *Songkran*. And it is no longer just Stargazers, it is many different warriors from all of the Changing Blood. *Phu Chi Fah!*

Japan

I went to the Land of the Rising Sun not long after I fled the Golden Triangle. I traveled there looking for one of the CEOs of the bad company that was poisoning my home. He was a man named Hideo Issunaki, and his stuffy black business suit contained more than the eye could see. He had offered himself to the Great Corrupter, and had been granted terrible powers. I was too young to fight him, but fight him I did. We ended up in the elevator shaft at the Landmark Tower in Yokohama. Don't ask me how. It was a terrible battle, he battered me with claws and a sucking tongue like a mosquito's mouth, and the whole time these malformed spirit spiders kept crawling out of the pipes and vents to bite big chunks out of my hide.

Did you know the Landmark Tower has the world's fastest elevator? It does. The same one that crushed Hideo Issunaki and lost me my left hand. It came rocketing downward and I tried to escape by bursting through the closed doors, and I almost made it. But the dark-hearted monster caught my hand in his own and pulled me back at the last second. My hand is gone. I've never been able to regrow it. Was it because his poison claws had dug into my wrist just before I lost it? I cannot say.

These things, they happen. Hideo was destroyed, that is the important part. But since then, in my next two decades of living, I have been back to Japan many times.

Few have been able to convince me that Japan is the wonderful place many say it is. It has its beauty, to be sure. But it is a broken land, an island adrift from the rest of the world. If I had to define it? I would say that Japan is the bastard son of both the Queen Spider and the Great Corrupter, for the Weaver and Wyrm have come together in terrible marriage in that country. How so? Those who have been there know what I speak of, and those who haven't look at me funny and say, *but they are nature-lovers!*

There is no nature in Japan. Gaia's presence has been captured, contained, choked into non-existence. Cement and concrete are the dominant spirits, and they have made alliances with specters of glass and steel, plastic and electricity. But where are the cherry

blossom trees, the red cedars, the beautiful conifer forests and rare mushrooms? Only in the paintings and poetry, I'm afraid. Japan even helps to destroy the rainforest timber in Malaysia and, as I painfully have learned, Burma and Thailand. Japan has no consciousness, no connection to the global spirit. They are worse than any in the West when it comes to raping precious Gaia. The rivers have dozens of dams, the whales are hunted, the ocean grows thick with pollution. It is even said that the photochemical smog in Tokyo has begun to take on a low level of consciousness, and has begun to act in predatory ways. I fear if this strange rumor is true.

Japan is one of the planet's most seismically active places in the world. The earthquakes that happen there are a sign that Gaia is hurting. She shudders like a flea-bitten dog, hoping to shake off the parasites that bite her flesh. And what can I say? She is right.

There are some allies of mine in Japan. What few Stargazers are active in Japan live mostly among the slim native population of the Ainu, following their finicky, strange totem, the Wise Otter. (They tell a funny story about how Otter is responsible for the imperfections of all Garoukind. It is said that when Luna was molding the Garou out of the cosmic matter of time and space, she was called away on an important errand. She called upon nearby Otter to finish the job, giving the animal explicit instructions on how to finish. But Otter decided first to finish fishing in the cosmic river, and then he decided to sun himself while laying in a basket of stars, and after awhile, he forgot entirely about finishing the Garou, and by then it was too late. Thus, we are an unfinished creature, and Otter finds this very, very funny.) Also, one must not ignore the Courts of the Nine-Tails. The Fox-Changers hold great dominion there, and have codified a great book of rules, protocol, and procedure for the courts in Japan. If you want further explanations, I recommend you visit Hari Snowprint, the resident Kitsune "guide." She lives up near the Ainu, actually, on the northernmost tip of the Hokkaido Island.

One more note on our allies there: the Hakken are not among them. They have turned their back on the Western Nation, as have many of our own tribe, but they do little to distinguish themselves otherwise. Many of our tribe consider them friends; I do not. They remain haughty and manipulative, and they are capable of bending honor to serve their whims whenever it suits them. Beware of them, and never play games with these arrogant *gengli*.

China

Saying that "*Yes, China is this,*" or "*No, China is not that*" is not so simple. It's as impossible as making a

single judgment on all people, all Garou, or even all Stargazers. It is myriad in its possibility. And, have you looked at a map recently? Very big place, China. China has 22 different provinces, 5 autonomous regions, 4 municipalities, all covering an area of about nine-and-a-half million square miles. Inside its borders, China has over 1.2 billion men and women living in its belly, one-sixth of the world's total population. She is not so easily categorized; China defies description. But I am brave, stubborn, and foolish, so I will try.

Out of all the places in the world, there are more Stargazers in China than anywhere else. Some are refugees from Tibet, but many were born in China and remain there today, living among the many Beast Courts. Others have come from the West, knowing that they will find little in Tibet. There are many of us there, and many sacred places that mean much to our tribe.

One of them is Songgao Mountain. This is where the greatest of our moots is held once a year, not long after the true new year. Only Stargazers are encouraged to attend; the other shapechangers and other Garou aren't welcome. Here, at the summit of this mountain, we engage in the telling of myths and legends, we air grievances, and sometimes we war with tooth and claw to solve disagreements. But such physical fights are rare — instead, many of the arguments are solved through great periods of gaming. We challenge one another openly with complex games, some unearthed from antiquity, others from the Weaver's modern cradle. We play such games there, using our wits and logic to undo the clever puzzles laid before us. There is also another strange story about Songgao Mountain. At the gathering point, there is a rock shaped like a sleeping dragon, and it's said that if all of our living tribe members were to gather at that spot during our great moot, then the rock would split in two! And from the center of the rock would be a child, a Stargazer metis but without disfigurement. And all metis from that point on would be cured of their deformities. It's a nice story.

Another place held dear to our tribe is the chambers beneath the White Dragon Temple in the Jiangsu Province. It is there, they say, that a wise Stargazer who lived in a shack on Dongting Lake came one day to teach the Garou monks there the secrets of moving with the wind. This altered form of Tai Chi took into account the body of the shapechanging Stargazers, and used that ability among our other natural skills to craft a new martial form. That old Stargazer was Kai Lin, they say. There, in the chambers below the temple, the tapestries still hang that are the treatises on the art of Kailindo. Many still train there today, for that is the center of learning such an art.

The last place I will tell you about is not so much a good place, but a place that all Stargazers should go. The Moon Peach Orchard, not far from the Forbidden City, was once our strongest caern in China. Hundreds of years ago, however, the Stargazers there grew complacent. They made many deals with the men of the Forbidden City, and spent many nights with mortal men in the Halls of Supreme Harmony, growing fat and happy on food, song, and wine. One night, on the winter solstice, they returned to their caern only to meet an attack by a band of bewitched outlaws, possessed by the spirit of Kung-Kung the Corrupter. And with them was an ancient dragon, maddened with taint, and this dragon king (called Ao Guang) and the servitors of Kung-Kung murdered all the Stargazers there, and then consumed the totem spirit. The caern is dead now, a grove of blackened, yet somehow still-living peach trees. They still bear fruit, but the peaches are bitter and make men sick. Odd, that peaches symbolize long life, eh? Stargazers may go there to meditate on what it means to lead a moderate life, and how vital it is to protect our holy places. If a Stargazer there enters the Mirror Lands, he will be assailed by the harrying spirits of the Garou that died there, for their souls were not allowed to pass on as a message to our tribe. It is a terrible place, full of fear and gloom. All should go there. Those who refuse are weak.

There is one more thing worthy of note about China, something that I, Geng Khai, believe will be written in our record with blood in the coming years. They say a great demon has awakened in China, crawling out of sleep once more. They call this beast Kaoru-Shinji. His motivations are unclear, but it is said that already he calls his Wyrm-fouled cultists back into his open arms. But I can smell his needs on the wind. The End of the World will truly begin here, in China. That is what the demon wants. He wants to foster Gaia's final breath. This is where the Apocalypse rises, like a stinking red tide.

Tibet

Tibet is a slave. Once our homeland, now what is it but a soul squeezed in the grip of a tyrant? China does terrible things to little Tibet. Its people suffer. They are tortured. Made to toil in work camps. Murdered, their bodies burned or hidden in the mountain passes.

I know I should say more about this place so holy to us, but what is there to say? We have been exiled. Shigalu is dead. Some of our tribe try to take the land back. Some camps attack with the intention of unshackling Tibet's sad heart. But the Chinese there, they call our attacks "terrorism." And they bring reprisals back upon our people. We take action, and the Tibetans suffer for it. The backlash is unforgivable.

We need an army. There are those on our side who work toward this end, but it is not so easy. Soon, perhaps. Soon we'll go home. And when we do, our tribe shall find new life again. We will make new roots and all will witness our glorious rebirth.

Korea

Poor little Korea. The North is led by a madman who starves and tortures the people, and they're ready to invade the South at a moment's notice! And so the South — easily more civilized but still short of the standards of peace and civilization we all seek in this world — is beholden to their violent, chaotic neighbors. It is a scary place to be.

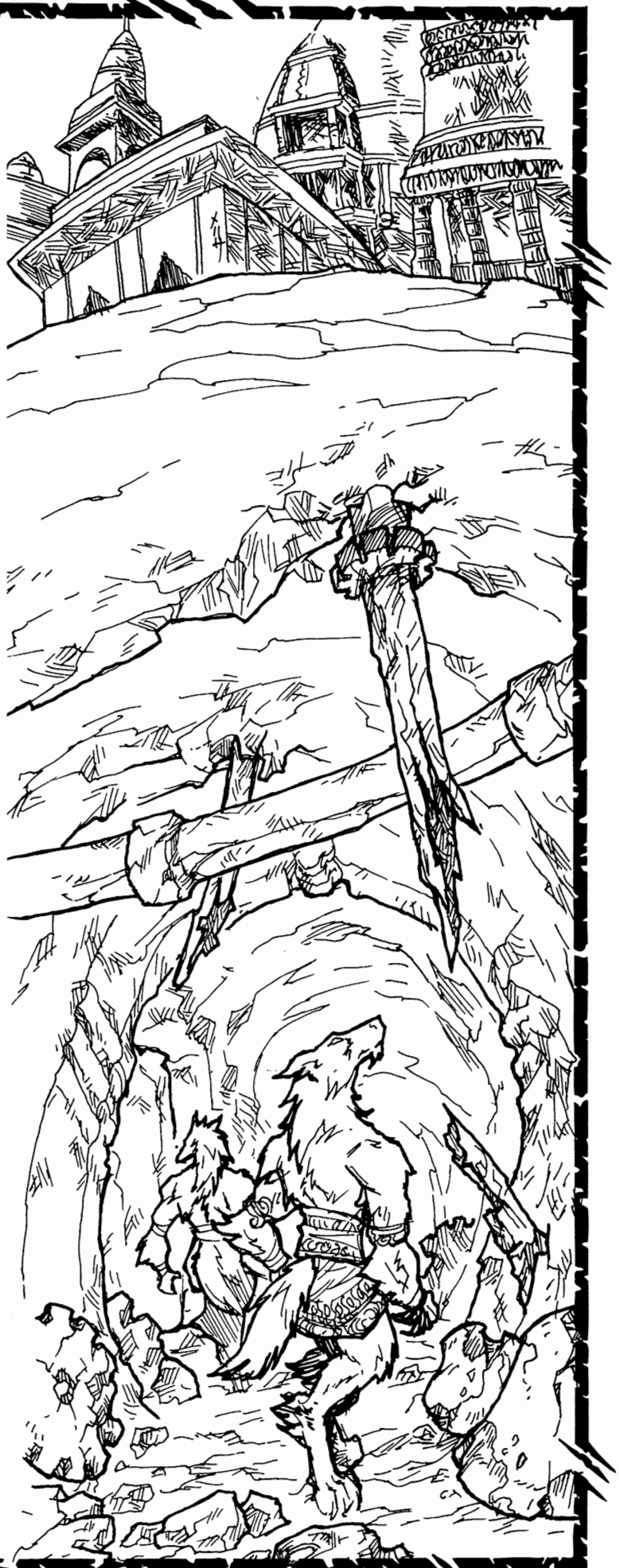
Scarier is the fact that there are two groups of our own tribe who are in their own strange little battle, one not delimited by borders or politics. See, once upon a time, in ancient Korea, the Stargazers were closely woven in with the growing society. We never showed our true selves, never revealed our forms, but the people were aware of our magic. Even today, there are still people in the Koreas that will come to our tribe members seeking wisdom or divination.

But sometime over the last hundred years, a rift developed. There are two groups, now — the *Naerim Mudang* and the *Tangol Mudang*. The first group are traveling shamans. They go to and fro and offer guidance and help to those who need it. But the *Tangol Mudang* are sedentary, and moreover, consider themselves "true-blooded." They claim lineage back to Klaital, and this argument of pure lineage makes them look down on the others with disdain. It is a terrible separation, and makes us look like petty Silver Fangs! Their "war" rarely becomes violent, but instead is more a "shadow war," always one-upping one another, always sabotaging homes and allies and friends. Disturbing, I say. Neither camp is *puen* to me.

India

Why is it that nobody thinks we have a strong presence within India? Are people so stupid to believe that if a Garou doesn't have slanted eyes and doesn't know martial arts that he couldn't *possibly* be a Stargazer? *Pfeh*! Our tribe still holds its own in India, even after so much loss. There are even many within our tribe that believe we come not from Tibet or China, but were born in the Indus Valley thousands of years ago! "Not powerful in India," hah. Fools.

India is actually home to two of our strongest remaining caerns. The first exists in the catacombs deep in the bowels below Calcutta. They call it the "Mystic Crux," but I've heard it referred to by a hundred different names, including the "Echo Chamber" and the "Channel of Voices." Half a millennia



ago, these maze-like tunnels below the city swarmed with the servitors of an ancient Bane called Dagon, but a band of warriors from our tribe attacked relentlessly over a period of decades. Finally they ousted the enemy and cleansed the area and took it for their own, but over time they noticed strange things about their newfound home. First was the strange machinery that lay scattered about — stone gears cracked and worn, bell-shaped weights stained with blood, and so on. Second was the rise and fall of the fluctuating *humming*. The walls and ground seemed to hum — and almost speak. The Garou there soon learned that if one meditated on this humming and tried to find the voice behind it, they could uncover lost secrets about the past and future. Over the years, many of our tribe (and others) have made pilgrimages to this caern in an attempt to truly decipher the voices, but only few find themselves able.

The second is a library tucked away in the mountain range that separates India from Pakistan. This caern has not been so fortunate as the latter. While the caern remains undiscovered due to the great lengths to magically veil it from prying eyes, it is still in an area that sees much warfare. But there is a worse thing that has happened in the past few years , since 1999, as I understand it. See, the library was founded by a *ksatriya* Stargazer who was the keeper of many of our ancient scrolls and records, but was dying. He knew he would not make it over the mountains, so he decided that there he would die and that his soul would call to others to come there. But a group of horrible spirits would not let him rest — these spirits, called Dakinis, were terrible harpies with an exacting thirst for cruelty! They are fearsome and ugly — their faces are like skulls, great spears of white light come from their eye sockets, and their bony shoulders are draped with the entrails of the innocent. They rode on the backs of undead tigers and giant vultures, and they attacked the poor *ksatriya*. But he was not deterred, and spent the last of his life on a ritual that bound the *Dakinis* to *protect* our ancient writings. And so, his soul called out to other Stargazers who came and built a library there after finding that his scrolls were fiercely defended by this monstrous spirits.

Unfortunately, a few years ago, something happened in the region, something terrible. It awakened much evil all across the land, and in those mountain ranges, it broke whatever grim spell held the Dakini spirits to the library. They fled, gibbering and cackling, and now they are free. From time to time they mount attacks on the caern, and those attacks grow more fearsome with each attempt. It is a terrible thing. If only one could find the ritual that the *ksatriya* used, perhaps they could again be fettered?

United States

Most of us come from China and India. Many of our tribe are born in those places and stay in those places. But there is another place that houses many of our kind by birth and by choice, and that place is America.

Even after the homecoming, even after the decree came down from on high that we no longer belonged with the other Garou, the United States still remains a place that holds many of our tribe. Some live in the areas of the big cities dedicated to our kin, like Chinatown or Little India or whatever it's called, wherever it is. Others take advantage of the wide-open spaces that America (or its neighbor, Canada) has to offer. There is even a remaining Stargazer caern of some prominence left there. Out in the province called Colorado, there is a network of old closed-down silver mines. These mines were worked upon over a hundred years ago by thousands of Chinese laborers, and even today many of their ancestors still live in the area. And these mines are more than they seem, so I'm told! It's said that deep in the dark Umbral bowels of the mine live a cadre of little spirits — relatives of our own totem — who know the history of the world from Day First to Day Last. They orbit around the caern's heart, and for the right price they will tell snippets of what they know. Our tribe watches over these spirits to make sure they don't fall into the wrong hands. We are aided by the local Uktena in the area, who are also adept at understanding the Emerald Mother's greatest mysteries.

We have much work to do in America, I believe. No matter what the decree has said, the East and West are not separate in the eyes of our Mother, are they? No, they are equal, they are balanced, and we must view them the same way. America is a place of great freedom, yes. If you travel the cities and villages of Bangladesh, you will find death and plague and bodies stacked high. Nobody is free to live as they would choose, but in America? All are free to follow life as they choose it, for good or ill. But that freedom also brings potential for great imbalance, for all are free to choose that as well. This extreme freedom is a terrible breeding pit for the influence of the Wyrm, who lives there perhaps more than anywhere else.

And so duty keeps many Stargazers in America. We have kin there, and we have duty there. Those still in America recognize that we all must attend to our tasks with strong dedication, or we will fail. America is a battleground, and there we still fight.

Europe

We grow scarce in this land of Europe. Do some of us still stay there? Of course. But it is a big place and we are small in number, so common sense will tell you that finding one of our kind there is a "needle-in-a-haystack" situation, you see?

Part of this is because the few caerns we held there are now gone. The Mother's Question caern that we held on Mount Snowden in Wales was abandoned and left to the local Fianna Garou. The caern called Whitecliffe was one we shared with the local Black Furies on the Greek isle of Santorini, but the Wyrm caught scent of the stock of secret fetishes stockpiled there. Soon the place was overrun with Black Spiral Dancers and corrupted men, and it crumpled like a paper cup. The last of our European caerns was one very tiny one on the outskirts of the Black Forest in Germany. The caern was a unique phenomenon, once I have not seen before or since. The powerful heart actually *moved*. It would never be in one place for more than a week, usually no more than a single night. It would appear as a bubbling stream one day, or an ancient tree the next. A single Stargazer pack, the Pack of the Chimera's Eye, tracked and protected this caern (which was called, obviously, Chimera's Eye). Another amazing thing is that the Black Forest is brimming with the Get of Fenris, *but they never know the Chimera's Eye existed.* Not once! Ha ha! They couldn't take a moment to pull their dog heads out of the ground to scent out that strange energy that waxed and waned from place to place. Oh, they came close from what I understand, but never succeeded. Either way, it doesn't matter now. There was a battle in the forest, a powerful Black Spiral Dancer fought the Get with an ancient weapon called Wyrmblade. This tainted weapon was destroyed, but it drank deep of many Garou's life, and while the shell was destroyed, the spirit of the weapon was not because the Get handling it were impatient and untrained. And now the spirit has defiled the forest, and like that, the Chimera's Eye no longer winked. It went away and could not be found. After a year of searching for it, the pack left the Black Forest and went to join the Beast Courts.

And so with no caerns and no great need to speak of, most of our kind has left or is leaving Europe. As I said, many still live there — but those who do tend to be of a rare sort who chooses to live in the cities (after all, Europe has all but decimated its Wyld areas), and wouldn't fare well anywhere else.

Africa

There are few places that I, Geng Khai, have never been to, but sadly, Africa is one of them. You'd think I would have been, yes? I have many friends among the Silent Striders, and some of these were even *born* in varying parts of Africa. So why have I not gone? I cannot say. Perhaps it is fear. The one thing that everyone fears most of all is the unknown, and if one place is unknown to me, it is Africa. Still, there are things I hear and things I know about this so-called dark continent, so I will tell you of our place there.

In Namibia, there is a satellite Beast Court run by one of our own, a metis Garou called Falling-Sky. He claims, as I understand, that his blood goes back almost two hundred years, when a group of Nguni tribesman helped to liberate a small group of Chinese slaves from their French masters. Falling-Sky is something of a radical. The environment needs release from the terrible coils of the Wyrm, this I know and agree with. But Falling-Sky and his furious sentai attack men and villages mercilessly, seeking to remove the poisons from the Emerald Mother's own chakra points. He murders in the name of justice. He murders in the name of our tribe. It disgusts me.

The Umbra

The Mirror Lands! Ah. Release. I have been near and far in this grandest of places. I have stalked the empty halls of the Jade Emperor's primordial palace. I have outwitted void-spirits on the silvery rings of Saturn. I have gone into the heart of Chimera itself and come out with secrets that *still* lie buried in the deep red chambers of my heart!

We Stargazers have an intimate relationship with the Umbra. I know what you're going to say — don't *all* of the Garou have a special relationship with the Mirror Lands? Of course. It would be ignorant to suggest otherwise, and you may trust that I am anything but ignorant. But the Stargazers have a unique bond with the Umbra. Why is this? There are many reasons.

First is that the Umbra is a place of mystery. In the Tellurian, the ground and matter and the rules and laws of science have become impenetrable except by a rare few. Reality, the Weaver, has taken a steel grip there and will not relinquish it! But in the Umbra? Things are not so firm. The farther out you go, the less certain everything becomes. And that is where our tribe flourishes. Among us are some of the greatest minds, able to undo the toughest knots and solve the most ancient of riddles. Many of us go *very* deep to find not only answers, but new questions as well. We speak to spirits that have no earthly representation except in the form of ideas or truths. We find some solutions, but always come away with new ambiguities. This is the way we like it!

Second is that, the stars we gaze upon nightly? How would one get to those stars, exactly? Through the Umbra, of course. We look to the Heavens to find balance, tranquility, and truth. But sometimes this is not enough. So we must take the next step and *go* to the Heavens. It is an uncharted place by no tribe except our own. Others are afraid to hunt those wide-open spaces, but such emptiness does not scare us. We are used to emptiness. For emptiness is a balance of all things.

And balance is the third reason that we have fostered a powerful link to the Mirror Lands. Once, the spirit world and the real world were linked together, bound as one much as the separate parts of our bodies are held together. But imagine if your head suddenly grew separate from your shoulders? Or, even more appropriately, picture what happens when your soul and your flesh are no longer one? The flesh becomes weak and the soul becomes lost. This is what has happened to Gaia. It is one of the dearest, darkest of imbalances. One that in our heart of hearts we wish to challenge and change.

So, yes. The Umbra! A dangerous place thick with wisdom. You'll find us there. You'll see our cubs going on their Rites of Passage in the bottomless places in the Mirror Lands. You'll see many of our elders guiding other Garou through the labyrinths, because only we know the way. Then, when you look the other way? Ha ha! We are gone, once more.

Stereotypes

The Tribes

Michael Walks-on-Ashes is one of our American tribe brothers. A few years ago, Michael traveled to the Middle Kingdom to present the mortal remains of his master to the earth of his master's homeland. Since then, Michael has been back and forth between the two places, serving as something of an informal emissary between the vastly differing worlds. He will tell us now, in his words, of the other Garou, of the Changing Bloods, and all the other beasts beyond them:

Black Furies

Why all women? All the world is a dichotomy of two or more things. Yin, Yang. Black, White. Good, Evil. Men, Women. The circle is completed that way. One without the other only makes a half, and a half isn't worth a damn in the coming days.

I don't mean to sully them. The Furies are good at what they do. They are wise and well-versed in the ways of war. But they have purposely created a

one-sidedness among themselves, deliberately choosing imbalance. Maybe there's wisdom there that I can't understand, but in my mind, it sounds like favoritism and near-bigotry. In these times, we need all the help we can get.

Bone Gnawers

Everything in this world is suffering, as many of our old masters would say, but I'm not sure anyone understands this precept as well as the Bone Gnawers. Confucius said something along the lines that, one can be poor in life but rich in the Way, meaning that money means nothing alongside a strong foundation in ritual, in understanding, in meaning. The Gnawers are rich, when it's understood that way.

Always trust those on the lowest rung of the ladder. They've lost everything, or in the case of the Bone Gnawers, willingly sacrificed. They have nothing left but the perfection of their own wisdom. (Well, and sometimes a bad smell and a batch of fleas, but such is the price of knowledge, it seems.)

Children of Gaia

It concerns me that they consider themselves the favored children of the Emerald Mother, but their heart is very much in the right place. I've heard other Garou talk about this tribe, and they always speak so dismissively, like they're some flock of doves and hippies that doesn't understand the "real deal." But truth be told, I've seen Gaians who fight with greater tenacity and ability than just about any other, and while they may not name their ways as such, they're bound to the ways of moderation and balance more than they probably think.

It's dismissive to say "always trust a Gaian," as I've met a few who were a little off their rocker with weird ideas, but ultimately, our two tribes complement one another. They make good friends, and better packmates.

Fianna

They distract themselves constantly from any kind of purification and enlightenment. Anytime one of them steps on the path, they decide to engage in some kind of off-the-cuff revelry, debauchery, and hedonism, and then it's *goodbye, enlightenment*. They know much love, but they know much hate, as well. This surely isn't the Middle Way.

If I'm telling you some kind of comment to go down in the ancient spiritual records of our tribe, let it be known that I'm just one voice among many. But I've never found them to be good allies nor good friends. They're too free, too loose. And they're about as focused as a hand grenade.

Get of Fenris

I met a Get one time while traveling through Hungary, actually. I told him I was a Stargazer, and he decided it was high time to prove some sort of European superiority over Asian culture (even though I have little more than a spoonful of Asian blood within me).

So we fought, despite my reluctance. He put up a good fight. And by "putting up a good fight," I mean "got his ass handed to him in a brown paper bag." After that, he deferred to me and I taught him some good centering meditation tricks. Sometimes the stars move in strange orbits...

Glass Walkers

Many of our tribe feel that the Weaver is the true supreme enemy, and that the Wyrm is mostly a victim. I don't agree, personally. I do think, though, that the Weaver is in this game as a selfish entity, and one that doesn't pull any punches in smothering the world in its static reality.

As such, the Glass Walkers tend to make me wary. They have such reliance upon technology, I can only wonder how long it'll be before they're corrupted. Some must be already. Surely you've seen the ones that bury Weaver fetishes in their own flesh? All things need to be carried in equilibrium. I don't recommend rejecting Weaver spirits and tools out of hand just because of the stamp of their maker, but I also don't recommend dependence upon them, either. The Glass Walkers are on a path far stranger than ours, it seems.

Red Talons

If there is a tribe that is closer to the cusp of extinction than we are, I wager it's the Talons. They have a terrible imbalance in their souls, and there is a hate that crawls through their blood like few have ever seen. Often enough they're capable of using that hate for positive ends, which still surprises me that such a bad thing can be harnessed in a *good* way. I fear though that someday it'll go bad, and stay bad.

Still, this tribe deserves nothing but respect and admiration. They're still alive. They still do their duty. Some are even reasonable to deal with. But just in case, bring every calming fetish and gift in your arsenal, because even a wristwatch can get you killed.

Shadow Lords

This tribe is a clear example of one apple spoiling the applesauce. In this case, it's a whole lot of apples, sure, but I find the metaphor still holds. There are a great many Shadow Lords who are little more than werewolves with Napoleon complexes. They feel they

have a right to rule, and yet they are always treated second, like the younger of two brothers. Unfortunately, this reputation has ruined it for those Shadow Lords who are bound to duty and honor, who are capable of going into battle knowing that they may need to offer their lives up to Gaia to keep her around a little longer.

And the Hakken are, generally speaking, excellent allies. They're a bit cold and definitely aloof, but their ways are honorable, their tenets appealing because they strive for perfection and balance as we do (though often in differing ways). I've known quite a few, and trusted ninety-nine percent of them. Can't necessarily say the same for Western Shadow Lords, but remember what I said about the bad apples?

Silver Fangs

Again, let's talk Confucius. He said, "The good man doesn't grieve that others do not recognize his merits. His only anxiety is lest he should fail to recognize theirs." That's the Silver Fangs, in my mind. Their pride prevents them from being successful. They understand the sacrifices involved with the task of leadership, but no one granted them leadership but themselves. And in this day and age, it seems the only ones who even *recognize* such leadership are other Silver Fangs. Others consider them as little more than court jesters wearing the king's robes. Their minds are going away, you know.

Perhaps I'm being too harsh. If the Fangs were to learn humility and attempt to achieve some perfection of wisdom instead of assuming that they already had it, then I think they would truly deserve the mantle of leader. But as of now... I have sincere doubts of their right to rule.

Silent Striders

I'm probably the wrong person to give an opinion on the Striders, as I've had many friends among them. I'm probably biased, but even in trying to examine them objectively I find they hold up well under scrutiny. They know the concept of the Wheel that spins, and they know our place upon it. They travel, like we do, and many are solitary, much as we are. There is obviously great debt dragging upon their souls, but who am I to say that we don't bear a similar or even deeper debt? So far, I've found few I couldn't trust, and none that didn't show up just when they were needed. I hear one of them was at Shigalu when it fell, fighting side-by-side with our own.

I don't know what else to say about them. Maybe they should be more rooted, more focused? Maybe they should try to integrate themselves better in the Garou Nation (which is advice we Stargazers soundly rejected). Whatever their problems, I'll stand by this tribe.

Uktena

The Uktena, to be honest, frighten me. Their adherence to extremely ancient ways is inscrutable. Ever sit in a sweat with one of these strangers? The things you see will never be repeated, not even in the weirdest corners of the Mirror Lands. Your lips and mind simply won't coordinate together well enough to pass along the information. The Uktena have shown us enigmas that have driven some of our own kind *mad.*

Some say the Uktena are too close to the Wyrm, but I've never found one that is. As bizarre as they are, they are mystics and magicians like this world has never seen. I've seen them deny themselves and engage in such asceticism that would make the Dalai Lama feel shame. They're powerful. And unfortunately dwindling.

Wendigo

Hasn't anyone ever noticed that their totem, the titular cannibal spirit, is altogether a little too close to the Wyrm incarnation Eater-of-Souls? Rumor has it that, from time to time, a Wendigo Gaffling wanders away from the others, and has the faintest stink of the Wyrm clinging to its ephemeral matter. I hope that's not a telling sign of the tribe. The Wendigo need to master their Rage as many of us have. We use it as a carving knife. They use it as a hammer.

The Fera

I hate to have to speak for the whole tribe about these — or any — of the other shapechangers, but I suppose I can give it as straight as I'm able.

Bastet

The Bastet. They have a particular nobility about them, and I don't specifically mistrust them. But you know they're not going to listen to you, not going to listen to reason, and probably won't even listen to each other. They're fiercely independent, and don't particularly like Garou. Most Stargazers I've met, regardless of how open-minded and accepting they are, just plain stay out of any werecat's way.

The Khan of the Beast Courts are similar, but somewhat more populous. I haven't seen many werecats outside of the Beast Courts, actually. The Khan seem fairly standard — peculiar, particular, solitary. But I've also seen, on separate occasions, individual Khan preparing a sentai hunting party for war. It's an impressive thing, worthy of awe.

The best way I can sum them up: The werecats are not out to hurt us. They're also not out to *help* us.

They deserve respect, and we will give them that whenever possible. Otherwise, I stand aside and let them do their work.

Corax

Have you ever seen a Corax suck the eyes from a cooling corpse? I have, and it's something you'll never forget. I'm sure, as spirits, it's something that doesn't concern you. But it definitely concerned me.

Beyond that, I personally have liked most of the wereravens I've met. They're a welcome pace from most Garou. Their senses of humor, though often morbid, have had me rolling on the ground on more than one occasion, and that's enough for me. Too often, I find, our kind forgets how to laugh. When that happens, call a Corax, *quickly*.

The Tengu are basically just the Corax, but of the Beast Courts. They don't act particularly different. They're somewhat more high-strung and better organized, but not by much. The one thing I can say for both the Eastern and Western wereravens is that they know, or are able to find out, just about everything. It's cost me on numerous occasions, but only one failed me. And he did it because I was American. Go figure.

Kitsune

I'm not yet certain what to think of the fox-changers. I've met many of them, each one of a slightly different color, stripe, and creed than the last. They claim deep allegiance to the Courts, but if there's one thing I've found that's consistent to the foxes, it's that they owe allegiance to themselves first and foremost, with everyone else coming up a distant second. I don't mean to suggest I don't trust them; I only know that I feel confident of them when our goals are aligned, but uncertain when they are not.

Ratkin

An old friend of mine, Deep Sky, was quite the collector of treasures. He had a simple paper fan, and contained within was a wind of the mountain spirit, and when he waved that fan (no matter how gently), he could conjure up a gale force to imbalance his enemies. This treasure of his was stolen one day by a Nezumi rat-changer that the locals called Aichi Twice-Tail.

Deep Sky went deep below Shanghai to find Aichi, and got considerably lost in the warrens beneath the city. For days he was lost, wandering through sewer tunnels and closed off government passageways until finally he caught up with the Nezumi. Deep Sky demanded his treasure back, and in return would bring no harm to Twice-Tail. Aichi was amenable, and gave the fan back. A day and a half later, Deep Sky re-emerged from the bowels of Shanghai and returned to the light — and the moment the fan hit the sun, it turned to a bundle of straw held together with mashed-up rat feces. Ratkin are good at what they do, and what they do best is remain completely untrustworthy.

Zhong Lung

Wise, slow, and deliberate are the Dragons. Long ago, for my teacher, I had to go to them for information. I sat among a circle of their women (whom they called "aunts"), and had to endure countless tales and periods of meditation that made even *my* mind tired. They gave me the information I desired. When I brought it back to my teacher, he discarded it, saying he already knew what I had learned. When I asked him why he sent me to speak to them, he smiled and that it was a "lesson in patience." That it was.

The Others

Vampires

I've heard that there are two divergent types of vampire, that the blood-drinking monsters in places like China and Japan vary from their Western brothers. Is that true? Maybe. I've met vampires in the States and vampires in China, and they did seem different, somehow. Is it just a cultural difference, or is it something altogether stranger? I can't say. Here, however, is what I *can* say:

I have seen vampires in Sacramento that were clearly not the same creatures as the ones I found in Boston. The ones in Sacramento were hideous to look at, showing off major decay, disease, and deformity. The ones out in Sacramento were... I hate to say it, more like us. They had features of the beast about them — yellow eyes, like a timber wolf. Or long, chipped claws that they could grow from the tips of their fingers. But these monsters all had one thing in common: Their dead blood and dead skin stank of the Wyrm.

In China, it's mostly the same. I've seen all colors and stripes of these monsters, but with one difference. Not every one of them had the Wyrm stain about them. What does it mean? Are they just better at mimicking humans? Is there something there that keeps their dead souls from toppling over the edge? In the end, be wary of them regardless. Just because their Wyrm stench doesn't make you double over and vomit doesn't mean that they're not monsters. They're all deeply out of balance, no matter how you cut it. Watch your back when you've got a vampire — *any* vampire — nearby.

Mages

There are many names for these supposed beings. Here in the U.S., they're referred to simply as mages, or witches. Overseas, you'll hear them called the Namebreakers, or in certain circles, the Lightning People. Rumor has it that they're humans (with all the fallibilities and foibles that come with the name) that have somehow captured great power. This varies from the ability to change a one-dollar-bill into a five-dollar-bill... to the ability to make Mount Fuji vanish into a cloud of ice and dust. I've walked alongside a few, but the only thing I learned is that you can't really make judgments about them as a group. Some are nobler than any human I've met, and others have hearts as black as the Wyrm's. There were a few I'd call friends, but on the other hand...

David Koizumi lives in Oahu, and once was one of the warders of the Caern of the Five Fishes in a grotto off of the main island. David's in a terrible state, now; his mind is pretty much lost to him. The story goes that he met one of these "mages," a beautiful woman who — over time — convinced David that she was secretly an ancient Celestine come from the sky to choose him to be her warrior. I don't know if it was some sort of magic, or just her bewitching manner, but David let her get very close to him. And very close to the caern. One night he awoke to find the sacred cave under attack by a small clutch of humans with horrible powers at their fingertips. David's mind was snapped like a twig, and the spiritual heart of the caern was left dry as a marrow-sucked bone. The other Garou still haven't been found to this day.

So be careful.

Hunters

Our kind has long been hunted, and will continue to *be* hunted for as long as we walk on Gaia's tender flesh. We merely need to take wise steps and take a cautious look around before crossing the street, so to speak, and we'll continue to avoid attention. I know others who feel that humans aren't any match for us. A few of them are dead, now. Draw from that whatever conclusions you'd like.

There's this weird rumor going around that some hunters have gained powers to hurt us? Some whispered tale about an old lady grabbing and hefting a Garou in their war form? Other tales persist. One young Theurge, who must've been mistaken, said that in the spirit world, one of their bodies was noncorporeal, with two bright eyes staring ahead. One black like ebony, the other red like rubies. I can't say if this story is true or not. Honestly, they sound like mages, to me. Whoever they are, if they don't bother you, then I don't suggest bothering them.

Wraiths

In Japan, they have something called the "hungry ghosts." So far, they're my only exposure to the realms of the dead. Any other information beyond that is best requested of a Silent Strider, for they are well-known to be well-versed in the ways of the dead worlds.

Anyway, these "hungry ghosts" are spirits that are somehow lost, confused, or otherwise wracked with great sorrow. So they remain, wandering, occasionally pestering family members or old acquaintances. I've heard that some get mean and play tricks, or are even capable of hurting others. It's funny, though. There's a day in Japan called the Tide of the Returning Ghosts. Boats stay in harbors on that night, and it's said that the god Emma-O calls home the ghosts, who crawl out over the waves and disappear. And they do disappear. Do they go to this Emma-O, who I've heard is secretly a demon? I don't know, but speaking of demons...

Demons

I was in Philadelphia's Chinatown about two months ago. I was seeing a man about a mystical jade Ho Toy statue that had been stolen from a friend's altar many years previous, but the store was closed. And then I felt it in the deep of my nose, like a pain behind my eyes. The Wyrm was present. I tracked it down to an alley that smelled of vomit and rotting garlic, and there I still can't believe what saw there.

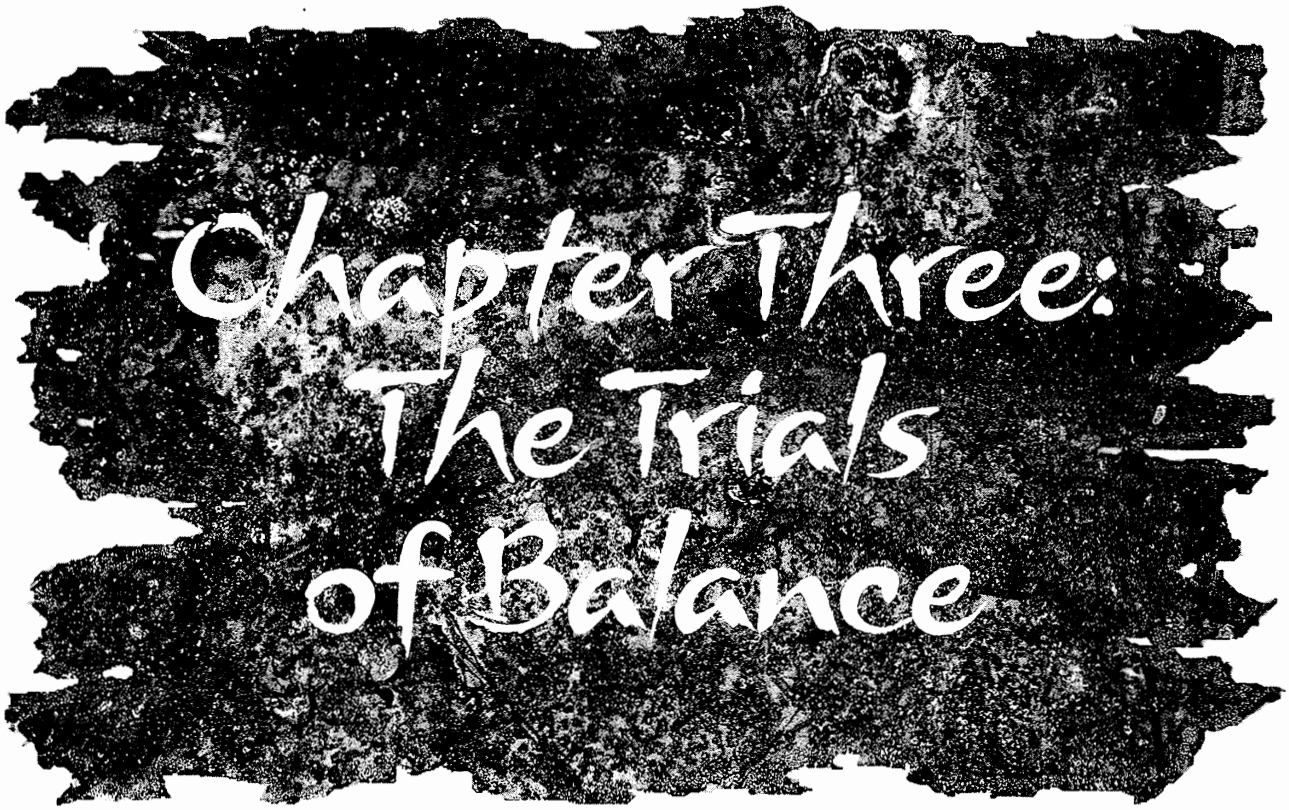
There was a woman lying on her belly, pinned down, her face pressed into a murky, oily puddle. Atop her sat something that was only vaguely human. It had terrible wings, like a crow-changer, but its face was twisted, and it glowed with this coruscating corona of bruised colors. Its jaw was oversized, unhinged like a snake's, and filled with jagged needle-teeth. It didn't even notice me at first. It was screaming at the woman, saying something like, "*Now do you believe?*" I changed quickly and charged, knowing that there was only one option that duty dictated. But the thing acted a split second before I came upon it, and it moved *fast*. It threw me into a dumpster. The strength it possessed...! I still can't believe it. We battled long and hard for what was probably minutes but felt somehow like hours. The thing hurt me badly. But thankfully, I think I hurt it just a *little bit* worse. I was left in the alley, bleeding from multiple bite wounds, and the last thing I saw was this awful beast taking flight and disappearing up over the lip of an apartment building. I don't know what it was. In the time it took me to recover (a few days; those bite marks are still scars I can't get rid

of), I did some research. I found next to nothing. The abomination looked like something out of myth. A Japanese *oni* spirit, or a Judeo-Christian devil-figure. I don't know. But I hope someone finds out. I don't like fomori who have learned to take the guise of major mythological figures.

As a sidenote, the woman is fine.

Walking Dead

Surely, even the spirits have noticed that the dead have suddenly begun to walk in grave numbers? It seems like a recent enough phenomenon to warrant some concern. For all of my life I've never seen any, and never heard of them existing outside of legend or rare magical events, and then what happens? I see ten in a matter of about two weeks. This was a couple years ago. And I've seen plenty since. They're all over Asia, actually, where they call them the *Kuang Shi*. I was traveling in Seoul and found them shuffling around in dark alleys, stealing food from the rack vendors. Not really hurting anyone, and they didn't overtly reek of the Wyrm. But clearly it's a sign of major imbalance in this world. Something has broken. Just another sign that the Age of Sorrow has truly opened its mouth to swallow us all.



Chapter Three: The Trials of Balance

Students of the Way of Strategy should train from the start with the sword and long sword in either hand. This is the truth: when you sacrifice your life, you must make fullest use of your weaponry. It is false not to do so, and it is false to die with a weapon yet undrawn.

— Miyamoto Musashi, *The Book of Five Rings*

The Stargazers cannot be easily defined. Some are masters of quiet contemplation, others are neophytes hell-bent on restoring balance to the world with tooth, claw, and blade. Though scattered, their focus on balance and harmony remains strong, and most of their Gifts, rituals, and abilities reflect this. The information portrayed in this chapter is unique to the Stargazer tribe, and any other Garou wishing to learn any part of it will have great difficulty doing so (and should only be allowed with Storyteller approval). Hopefully this chapter will help you nail down the essence of the tribe, providing concrete details but also acting as a springboard for new ideas.

Backgrounds

While Stargazers may be different from their Western cousins, they're still Garou to the blood and bone, and as such have all the advantages and demerits that all other werewolves are home to. Their Backgrounds are primarily the same as any other Garou, but there are some further ideas presented here to help you in creating your own Stargazer. These explorations of Backgrounds aren't etched in stone, but are merely options to help you customize your character.

Allies

Allies are a small but critical part of a Stargazer's life. Their numbers are dwindling and friends are desperately needed, though most Stargazers only have one or two key allies to their name. However, while Stargazers are considered to be reclusive, usually this is in regards to other Garou; from time to time, a few rare tribe members go amongst humans (usually Kin) to preach balance to Gaia's most vulnerable children. Throughout history, some members of the tribe have placed themselves in direct concordance with emperors, teachers, students, warriors, all in an effort to guide them down the path of truth and moderation, a path meant to lead away from the depredations of the Wyrm. Helping others sometimes means receiving help in turn, and may carry their Allies score past the first or second dot.

Ancestors

Any Stargazer should have been raised with their ancestors in mind. The majority of the tribe has a high level of awareness when it comes to forebears, knowing the names, deeds, and lineage of those who have come before them. This leads to a rather special relationship with their ancestors, one which many Stargazers strive to maintain with prayers, libations, and small altars.

The Stargazers are more prone to tightening the bonds of ancestral wisdom than most, and it's very appropriate for a Stargazer to take points in Ancestors. It is also recommended that the player begin with a list (and brief descriptions) of at least one of her ancestors per point taken in the Background. In other words, choosing three dots in the Ancestors Background means that the player should detail at *least* three of her Stargazer forebears, as they may come to play later in the game.

Contacts

Most Stargazers are without contacts. They would far rather possess honest-to-Gaia allies than the "lesser" considerations of mere associates. That's not to say it doesn't happen; those Stargazers who still choose to walk among humanity may inadvertently come to have contacts, but rarely does a tribe member pursue them.

A Stargazer among the Beast Courts might possess a wide array of supernatural contacts, from the Kinfolk of other Fera to the other Fera themselves. A Stargazer who remains predominantly unaffiliated with the Beast Courts and remains in the West could have contacts among the Garou Nation, but this is easier said than done.

Fetish

Most Stargazers reject the practice of fetish creation and use altogether. Reliance upon any object — mystical or otherwise — promotes weakness in the Garou's own faculties, they say. Using a fetish item means not having to learn a skill yourself, and it becomes too quickly the "easy" way out. That's not the case with all Stargazers, however. Some Stargazers seek out and use fetishes just like other Garou. These items can range from the simple (a smooth pebble found in a stream meant to symbolize the flowing nature of all things) to the complex (an antiquated telescope used to stare up at the heavens). Some Stargazers craft fetishes meant for war — swords, for instance, both short and long.

While sometimes a Stargazer will make a fetish that imbues him with preternatural Gifts in battle, most tend to use spirits that relate to tranquility or moderation (often utilizing water or wind spirits). In game terms, a Stargazer cannot purchase any dots in Fetish during character creation — he inherits no fetishes from tribemates or mentors — but may acquire or create fetishes as usual during the course of the chronicle.

Kinfolk

One of the odd conundrums consistently facing the Stargazers is that while their own tribal numbers decline, the number of their Kinfolk has remained unusually steady over the last several years. The network of Kinfolk available to the Stargazers is vast and deep, containing close members that the tribe members keep a watchful eye over, and also far away family that has only been heard of but never actually discovered. Why the large numbers of Kinfolk haven't (at least until very recently) yielded representative births of Stargazer pups is still something of a mystery. Part of it is because the tribe members are reluctant to breed, many of them believing that breeding is intrinsically married to lust and desire — two traits that are unpopular among many Stargazers. Still, any Stargazer having Kinfolk within reach is sure to remain steadfast and devoted to them.

Pure Breed

Pure Bred characters are rare among the Stargazers, especially considering how significantly their numbers have dwindled in these dangerous times. But even when it occurs, it is given little fanfare among the tribe members themselves, for they are not given to such pomp and circumstance. When a Pure Bred member of the tribe is found, they are held as a welcome exception and little more. They may gain preferential treatment in some ways, but generally speaking most Stargazers won't automatically defer to a Garou with Pure Breed. It's an uncommon trait, not a mark of one's worth. (Though it's important to note that spirits and other non-Stargazer Garou may consider it more valuable than the Stargazers themselves.)

Those Stargazers that have the Background tend to be born with strong intuition, which may translate into higher scores in both Primal-Urge and Enigmas. Pure Bred Stargazers tend to have the physical characteristics of the rare Tibetan Black Wolf. Their fur is sleek, black, and their eyes are uncharacteristically green. Their Physical Attributes may be primary. Those who are less Pure Bred tend to have a more motley, piebald appearance. Their fur may be shot through with black, but in general they have a smattering mix of gray and white fur. From time to time, they're even born with eyes of two different colors — one may be the green of the Pure Bred wolf, whereas the other would be gray or blue.

Resources

Some say that money makes the world go round — but the Stargazers couldn't care less. Money to most tribe members is little more than a means to an end. If money is necessary in a specific instance, then so be it. Otherwise, can a Garou stave off the Apocalypse by paying off the Wyrm? No, and hence money means

little. Some shirk it altogether, regardless of its occasional use. Those Stargazers who are hard-line ascetics or believe that the Weaver is the real enemy will avoid money as if it were germ-ridden. In fact, most Stargazers won't ever have a point of Resources, and if they do (consult Storyteller before taking the Background), it's rarely past the first dot. Beginning Stargazer characters may not take any dots in Resources.

Rites

The Stargazers are keen to share their rites among all members of their tribe — or at least those who hold similar beliefs. Rites aren't considered "secret" knowledge, at least within the tribe. Rarely, however, will Stargazers share their ceremonies and practices with other Garou, or even other Fera within the Beast Courts. The rites the Stargazers learn stand as proof to the solution of ages-old puzzles, and should others wish to discover the answers, then they are left alone to do so.

Totem

Often, the "Sage and Student" pairing of many Stargazers will make use of a single totem together. The totem chosen depends upon the background and ancestry of both parties, but will often be Chimera. Chimera is a popular totem first because she is the tribal guardian, and second because she allows his children to find the truth behind the illusions. Uktena is a popular totem as well for similar reasons.

In the modern day, many Stargazers have neglected the Sage and Student partnership and have gone back to their roots and formed all-Stargazer packs. These packs may favor any totem, but rarely will they follow the totems of War that are chaotic or unbalanced (Fenris, Griffin, Wendigo). Most choose totems of Wisdom or Cunning.

Stargazer Names

The naming conventions of the Stargazers are different than those of other tribes, and even vary within the tribe itself. In these modern days, the natures of Stargazer names are not bound by any hard and fast rules, but still some traditions are dearly held.

For instance, Chinese (or other East Asian) Stargazers tend to take those who have just experienced their First Change and put them through elaborate rituals. These naming rituals are meant to destroy their previous names (hence diminishing their sense of "self") and also hide their identity from the Great Corrupter, Kung-Kung. It is believed that the Wyrm can smell out their old name, but by renaming them, the evil spirits will not be able to find the newly changed Stargazers. The new names they are given (they aren't allowed to choose) are often proper names and not necessarily symbolic or deed names like other Garou tend to take. Though, from time to time, such names (such as "Starchaser" or "Running-Moon-River") do get tacked on after appropriate deeds warrant such additions.

In India, however, Stargazers are allowed to choose their own names. There are also elaborate naming rituals (in which the heroes of old and the spirits of all directions are hailed), but once those rituals are concluded, the Stargazer is expected to seek out her own name. The name is typically the name of a past hero of the tribe and may be affixed with a symbolic epithet. This epithet is less about what the Stargazer *is* or has accomplished, but is more about the Stargazer's own intended plans for herself. She may call herself *Vaitreya the Blood-Singer* or *Vaitreya Bloodsong* if she is a war-capable Galliard who seeks to inspire her fellow warriors with songs of battle and glory. Also, unlike the naming conventions of the Chinese Stargazers, the names of the Indian tribe members may change often

Optional Tribal Weakness

Stargazers have answered many of the great mysteries of life, and have raised even more questions in the wake of discovered solutions. They are seekers of truth, and untying the countless knots that the universe provides as puzzles is one of their missions. Enigmas are useful in many fashions. Besides helping solve ages-old problems and improving Gaia's condition, puzzles help a Stargazer find focus and suppress Rage. Many riddles and conundrums are frustrating and stir a Garou's Rage, and the Stargazers take great pride in skirting this edge while remaining intensely focused and tranquil.

Unfortunately, this focus is also a problem. Many Stargazers become so single-minded about problems that they have been thus far unable to solve. As such, when a Stargazer fails an Enigmas roll, he begins to meditate too much on the problem, obsessing over it. The werewolf has trouble resting until the problem has been answered; this can cause a whole host of unfortunate effects, up to the Storyteller's discretion. It may lower the difficulty by one on his Rage rolls until the mystery is uncovered. It may distract him to the point where many actions become difficult, and may increase the difficulty by one on rolls involving Perception, Alertness, Stealth, or even Investigation. It could even reduce his dice pool by one on any Enigmas roll involving a puzzle other than the one he's currently obsessing upon. The Stargazer tribal weakness is, of course, an optional one; however, it helps to lend some depth to the tribe as a whole.

throughout their lives. As new deeds are accomplished or as her life changes, she may literally assume a dozen different names throughout this incarnation.

Stargazers who are born or experience their First Change in the West tend to have a mish-mash of naming conventions, often similar to the Garou around them. They may take a proper Western name (such as Geoffrey or Peter) and affix to it either a Chinese term (*Huang Xi*) or an epithet appropriate to the tribe ("Comet-Tail" or "Blessed-of-Stars").

New Skill

Stargazing

Guolao the Long-Living rested his elbow on the bamboo drum and wiped sweat from his brow. The way the sentai was overtaken, and all of that blood... no, he decided, he wouldn't think of it. Instead, he'd stare up at the stars, as he always had done, and seek peace therein. The winking eye of Venus calmed him. The stitching of the Seven Sisters filled him with ease. A faint meteor trail crossing Orion's belt and soothed him. If only that strange red star weren't so troubling; but what could be done?

Long have the Stargazers made good example of their name by staring upward at the Heavens, searching for answers. Stargazing is both a form of meditation and a plea for truth from the very cosmos. The movement of the celestial spheres, eve -cyclical, is simply a larger version of the microcosm of the world and the lives of its inhabitants. This skill is a combination of both actual astronomy and of meditation. It allows one to both understand what she's seeing up there in the night-time sky and to decipher its hidden, metaphorical meanings. A Garou may use it to help chart her way through the celestial skyscape of the Umbra, or (at Storyteller's prerogative) she may instead use her Stargazing score to complement any Enigmas roll she makes to work out a particularly damning puzzle.

- • Student: You know the names of the nine planets and some of the major stars.
- •• College: You know most of the constellations and how to track the movement of the heavenly bodies.
- ••• Masters: You know all the constellations and many individual star names, and you are able to relate the movement of the heavenly bodies to the movements of all things.
- •••• Doctorate: You are aware of all celestial events (comets, meteor showers) and can relate them to daily life.
- ••••• Scholar: The night sky holds no secrets from you.

Possessed by: Astronomers, Elder Stargazers, Theurges

Specialties: Meditation, Puzzle-Solving, Planets, Stars, Constellations

New Metis Deformities

• Birthmarks

Birthmarks from a metis birth are not small, insignificant spots or blotches. They often cover much of the body, and those spots always result in hairless patches. They are also sometimes found on the face. Types of birthmarks include the bruise-purple Port Wine stain (which can be raised and puffy), the blood-vessel red or blue blotches of the hemangioma marks (which are often on limbs and appear diseased, despite their harmless nature), and macular stains (which may cover the body in a uniform pink blotch despite racial origin). These birthmarks are never something a Stargazer can hide; they do not go unnoticed. They are full-blown deformities covering the expanse of their flesh with mottled skin stains. It increases the difficulty of dealing with other Garou *and* spirits by one.

• Third Eye

The third eye deformity may be considered holy among certain Stargazers (specifically those of India or Tibet, who feel that the third eye may represent a heightened enlightenment), but it's still ultimately a physical deformity. The "eye" is not a functional organ, and actually may look very little like an eye at all. The deformity is typically on the forehead (though it could actually show up anywhere on the face or head), and often appears as a milky, pupil-less orb surrounded by folds of bunched-up excess skin. The eye weeps runny fluid and twitches occasionally. Dealing with anybody, be it a human or Garou, yields a +1 difficulty to all Social rolls. And covering the tertiary eye is an option, but a painful one. Hiding the deformity behind something (a headband, a hat, etc.) only irritates it, and this irritation causes -1 dice pool to all Mental rolls as it impedes concentration.

Gifts

The Stargazers are not a tribe to rely upon their Gifts, preferring instead to resolve problems and puzzles with their own ingenuity, but they still have them and still use them. The following Gifts can be taught to any Stargazer of the appropriate rank.

• Paper Butterfly (Level One) — Ancient court magicians of the Chinese emperor were able to conjure a cloud of paper butterflies out of thin air. Stargazers who have mastered this trick use it to create a mood of tranquility, or can use them to distract an opponent. This Gift is taught, appropriately enough, by a butterfly or moth-spirit.

System: The player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Wits + Performance (difficulty 6). A flock of fluttering butterflies (a dozen per success) made of

varying colors of paper appears in the air around the Stargazer's head. The butterflies may be instructed to head in any direction (up to a number of yards equal to the werewolf's Willpower score). If the Stargazer is using this Gift as a distraction to an opponent, the butterflies take one turn to reach the opponent. The successes on the roll to activate the Gift subtract successes away from the next non-reflexive roll the opponent attempts to make. This happens on a two-to-one basis, however. Every success on the roll to activate the Gift subtracts *two* successes from the opponent's. (In other words, if the Stargazer scores three successes, it can take away a full six successes from the opponent's roll if able.) If the Stargazer has successes left over, they can apply to the opponent's next action next turn.

MET: *Basic* Gift. By spending a Gnosis Trait and making a Mental test (retest *Performance*) against a target, the Stargazer may cause that opponent to be down a number of Traits equal to twice the Stargazer's permanent Gnosis rating on their next test; should this reduce an opponent to zero Traits, they may still attempt the test, but automatically lose all ties. (If the target possesses a power that normally permits him to win all ties, these two effects cancel each other out, and the test is resolved normally.) If desired, the Stargazer may choose to split this Trait modifier between their opponent's next two actions however they desire, though they cannot apply to actions past that range, and cannot re-use this Gift against the same target until the effects of the previous use have expired. Additionally, multiple simultaneous uses of this Gift against the same target are not cumulative. At the Narrator's discretion, Gifts such as *Call the Breeze* or similar powers may diminish or even cancel this Gift's effects outright.

• **Imbalance (Level One)** — A Stargazer possessing this Gift causes considerable problems to all attackers. Those attacking find themselves clumsier and less nimble with every successful strike. An earth elemental teaches this Gift.

System: At the beginning of close combat (this Gift cannot be activated after the first turn of combat), the player spends a Gnosis point. If an attacker completes a successful hit against the Stargazer, the attacker's next roll to strike is at +1 difficulty. Each turn thereafter, the Stargazer may spend a Rage point to continue the +1 difficulty to hit for another turn.

MET: *Basic* Gift. Provided it is activated no later than the first time of combat, the Stargazer may spend a Gnosis Trait to immeditately inflict the Negative Physical Trait: *Clumsy* to one attacker engaged in close combat with her. (Multiple attackers may all be targeted at once, provided the requisite Gnosis is spent and they are all within the required range.) This Gift lasts for as long as the Stargazer is willing to spend Rage Traits — one Trait per attacker per turn. However, while it cannot be applied to enemies striking from range, it still applies against opponents who are in close combat with the Garou and later try to flee, provided the Stargazer continues to pay the Rage cost to maintain the Gift.

• **Channeling (Level One)** — Rage is both a boon and a bane to the Garou, and the Stargazers feel this doubly so. Rage, while certainly a vital resource, is also a dangerous element. Many Stargazers seek new ways to harness and direct their Rage, and those with this Gift have at least one more option. A Garou using this Gift can channel her Rage into a single action, helping her perform that one action as best as she is able. This Gift is taught by a fire-spirit.

System: Once per game session, the player may spend up to three of the Garou's temporary Rage on a single action. Each point spent in this manner gives the Garou an extra die for that roll.

MET: *Basic* Gift. Once per session, the Stargazer may spend a Rage Trait to gain a retest on a single action; what's more, on this retest the Stargazer is considered to be up a number of Traits equal to her current Rage rating. While the inner balance taught by this Gift makes it appropriate to use in just about any situation, not just physical tasks or combat, the Narrator may well require a frenzy test for using this Gift to perform particularly intense or physically demanding tasks.

• **Drunken Spider (Level Two)** — This Gift is primarily practiced by those Stargazers who feel that the Weaver is the true enemy of Gaia. With this ability, the Stargazer may affect the logic centers of any Weaver-spirit, jumbling its mind into sluggish discord. If the spirit isn't part of any physical manifestation mirrored in the "real" world, the spirit is merely hampered and confused. If performed on a spirit that's part of the soul of a machine, it actually makes the machine work significantly less efficiently, and thus makes it harder to use. A computer affected as such may not do what the user intends. Hitting "Enter," for instance, might trigger the "Backspace" key instead. Or opening a document might cause it to appear as gibberish. This Gift can be taught by either a cockroach-spirit or a water-spirit.

System: The player spends one Willpower point and rolls Charisma + Crafts (difficulty of the spirit's Gnosis). If the spirit is "alone" and unassociated with any real world device, then each success on this roll reduces the spirit's Willpower rolls to act by one die. If the spirit is associated with a machine, then each

success raises the difficulty to use the device by one as it acts oddly and performs erratically and slowly. The muddling effects last for the duration of the scene.

MET: *Basic* Gift. By spending a Willpower Trait and making a Social test (retest *Crafts*) against a difficulty of the spirit's Gnosis, the Stargazer may attempt to impair the logical functioning of a Weaver spirit. If successful, spirits encountered "alone" are considered a number of Traits down on all Willpower tests equal to the Stargazer's Willpower or Gnosis rating (whichever is higher). Ghosts in machines cause the devices to misbehave or malfunction; this disorder is best left in the hands of the Narrator, though in the case of weapons or items being used directly in the scene, this Gift forces the user to retest the first successful test made with the device each turn, making failure far more likely, due to "system crashes" or "mechanical malfunctions." Both effects last for the remainder of the scene, and multiple uses of this Gift are not cumulative.

• **Wuxing (Level Two)** — There is a mystical resonance — *wuxing* — that exists between the elements of water, fire, earth, metal and wood. These elements are the basic forces underlying everything in the world, and the resonance between them is something that a Stargazer with this Gift can hear *and* tap into. The Stargazer can take the reverberation between elements and tweak it temporarily; the result is, for a short time, that one element can be changed into the other. This Gift may only be taught by an avatar of Chimera.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Enigmas (difficulty 7, or 9 to affect particularly hard or rare metals). Each success allows for one square foot of a particular element (water, earth, fire, metal or wood) to be changed into an alternate type of the same group of elements. Fire may become wood, water may become earth, and so on. The dimension of the element doesn't change — a fire in the fireplace still retains its "shape," but may now be made of wood, earth, or even water (water doesn't change the shape either; it actually retains the same shape, but is simply liquid held fast to a specific contour). The effect lasts for a number of turns equal to the character's permanent Gnosis score.

MET: *Basic* Gift. Use of this Gift requires a Mental test (retest *Enigmas*), with a difficulty based on how hard or rare the material being worked with is. Success allows an amount of the element up to a number of square feet equal to the Garou's Gnosis or *Enigmas* rating (whichever is higher) to be changed into an alternate element of one of the traditional types. Note that shape is still retained, even for objects transmuted to liquid. Only fairly basic manifestations of the five elements can be generated by this Gift — it does not allow the Stargazer to conjure up radioactive isotopes, exotic chemicals and so on. This Gift lasts for a number of minutes/turns equal to the character's Gnosis rating.

• **Mouthpiece of the Successor (Level Three)** — According to an old and almost forgotten Stargazer tradition, a dying Garou may ask for a "mouthpiece" to come sit by his side and listen to him. The mouthpiece would then go to the rest of the sept and deliver the departed Stargazer's secrets, stories, or last wishes during a funerary moot. Somewhere along the way, this Gift was concocted to aid in this tradition. With it, the mouthpiece may literally "record" the dying Garou's voice and "play" it back through her own mouth later. The recording is literal — it's the same exact voice, not the voice of the mouthpiece. Those who know the Gift now rarely use it for its original purpose, for it can be used to record *anybody's* voice, for any reason at all. This Gift can be taught by either a mockingbird spirit or an avatar of Raven.

System: When "recording," the player rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty 7). The number of successes dictates how long the mouthpiece can vocally chronicle another's words. Each success allows for up to two minutes of recording to occur. If the Stargazer wishes to chronicle more, the player must make another roll. If the roll botches, the Stargazer using this Gift loses her voice for a single day. When the "mouthpiece" wants to replay the conversation later, she can do so at any time by spending one Gnosis point.

If the subject is not aware of the Gift's use (or is aware and seeks to defy its use), the subject may roll Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 7). Every success on this roll removes one of the successes of the Gift-user's roll.

MET: *Intermediate* Gift. Recording a willing subject requires only listening patiently; two minutes per level of *Empathy* the listener possesses may be recorded in this fashion (minimum two minutes). This Gift may be used only once per scene, but may be used repeatedly over multiple scenes if the circumstances permit. Replaying the conversation costs one Gnosis Trait. Recording an unwilling or unaware target's voice requires a Mental test (retest *Empathy*) against the target's Social Traits (target retests with *Subterfuge*). Actual recording devices may be used to simulate this Gift's effects in-game, or the player may simply announce "I am speaking with the voice of <subject>" before replaying the recorded conversation. Note that this Gift doesn't provide any special powers of recall for conversations recorded — it is quite possible for an inattentive listener not to remember exactly what was said until they play it back aloud at a later date!

• **Wind's Returning Favor (Level Three)** — A Stargazer may use weapons, but most need none. This Gift allows a Stargazer to take an opponent's weapon upon their attack. This Gift is taught by a wind-spirit.

System: The player spends one Willpower point and rolls Dexterity + Dodge (difficulty of the opponent's Wits + Melee score). The Stargazer must be in close combat and be using this Gift while the opponent makes a melee attack against her. The Stargazer's successes take away the success on the opponent's attack roll; if the Stargazer's successes outnumber those obtained by the opponent to attack, then the Stargazer is able to steal the attacker's weapon and use it the following turn.

MET: *Intermediate* Gift. A Stargazer may only use this Gift against a foe wielding a melee weapon against her in close combat. To attempt to steal a foe's weapon, the Stargazer must spend a Willpower Trait and allow her foe to attack her; she may attempt to *Dodge* normally, but cannot harm her foe during this turn. If she successfully avoids the strike, she may immediately call for a Simple Test — on a win or a tie, she has stolen the attacker's weapon, and may use it the following turn. Due to the speed and magical nature of the Gift, the foe receives no chance to use *Melee* or other Abilities and powers to retest this Simple Test. Failure means that the weapon remains with the attacker, although the Gift may be attempted again if the Stargazer desires.

• **Summon the Chu-Mong (Level Four)** — A long time ago, the Stargazers of Tibet made a pact with an ancient tribe of mountain spirits called the *Chu-Mong* (snow goblins). The pact was one of mutual protection, and a Stargazer using this Gift can reawaken the usefulness of the pact, at least temporarily. It summons the spirit of a Chu-Mong to help protect the Stargazer in question. Only a Chu-Mong can teach this Gift.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls the Stargazer's Gnosis. The difficulty isn't the area's Gauntlet — the difficulty is actually reliant upon the temperature. The warmer the temperature, the harder it is to summon a *Chu-Mong*.

Temperature	Difficulty
Below 0 degrees F	5
0-32 degrees F	6
32-49 degrees F	7
49-65 degrees F	8
65-80 degrees F	9
Above 80 degrees F	10

Botching the roll summons a snow goblin that is hostile toward the Stargazer using the Gift.

MET: By spending a Gnosis Trait and making a Gnosis test against a Trait difficulty outlined in chart above, the Stargazer may attempt to summon a Chu-Mong, using the same statistics provided. If this test fails, the Spirit Keeper should immediately make a Simple Test — on a failure, the Chu-Mong appears as requested, but is hostile to the Stargazer.

Snow Goblin (Chu-Mong)

A Chu-Mong is a small creature (like a primate in size and appearance) covered in fine white hair with long claws and a lower-jaw needled with yellow fangs.

Willpower 8, Rage 5, Gnosis 6, Essence 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Materialize, Freeze

• **The Silken Cloth (Level Four)** — This Gift takes its name from an ancient Stargazer tradition. It's believed that those who are not shapechangers cannot enter the Mirror Lands of the Umbra because they are impure. They do not have a kernel of the celestial substance of cosmos within them, as the Garou and the other Fera do. But many Stargazers still wished to show mortals (or others unable to access the Umbra) the hidden truths and puzzles found only in the Mirror Lands. Once, Stargazers could purify others with a silken cloth, rubbing them with it, so that they may enter the Umbra together. Now, that ability has been made into a Gift. This Gift lets a Stargazer bring one other human (or otherwise Umbra-banned individual) with her when she Steps Sideways. This Gift is taught by an Engling.

System: The player must make two stepping sideways rolls: one for the Stargazer, and one for her "guest." However, the Stargazer must spend one Gnosis point for the guest to come through with her. If the roll to bring her guest across botches, the poor soul is lost somewhere in the Umbra — even someplace as horrible as the Abyss or the Atrocity Realm.

MET: *Intermediate* Gift. Although many Stargazers surround this Gift with appropriate preparatory rituals and lessons to ease the shock of the journey, at its heart all this Gift does is allow the Garou to make an additional stepping sideways test to bring one additional "guest;" this test is otherwise treated as a normal crossing test in every way, save that the Garou pays any attendant costs. At the Narrator's discretion, a particularly dramatic failure on this crossing test may have all manner of unpleasant results, and even if it proceeds normally, the Garou should remember that their guest will still depend on them to provide a means of returning as well. This Gift can never be used on an unwilling subject, nor can it bring over imbued hunters (see **Laws of the Reckoning**).

• **Ancestral Incarnation (Level Five)** — The connection of a Stargazer to his ancestors can be deemed more "intense" than that of other Garou. This Gift is proof of that. The few Stargazers with this Gift are not only able to plumb the depths of the ancestral memories for help, but are literally able to *become* one (or many) of their ancestors for a short time. The

Stargazer glows with a pale nimbus of light and actually exhibits the physical traits (altering her appearance) of one or several of her ancestors. For a time, the Stargazer may also tap into the wealth of knowledge and ability of her forebears and use that to enhance her own actions for a time. This Gift is taught by an Epiphling of Truth.

System: The player spends three Gnosis points. The Stargazer exhibits a number of ancestral traits equal to the dots in her Ancestors Background. (For instance, Naipurya Sunblade has an Ancestors score of three. She exhibits three traits of her ancestors that alter her appearance. From her ancestor Silverstar she gains a mane of gray hair, from her ancestor *Fu-Kui-Kang* she shows bright yellow eyes, and from her ancestor Gi-om Shows-the-Way she gains a long scar along the length of her muzzle.) For the remainder of the scene, the Stargazer may also add her Ancestors score to *any* roll she makes.

MET: *Advanced* Gift. Only Stargazers with the *Ancestors* Background may purchase this Gift. Activating it requires three Gnosis Traits, and the effects last for the remainder of the scene. For the remainder of the scene, she adds twice her rating in *Ancestors* to all tests, and she may choose to spend levels of *Ancestors* to retest any Ability-related tests during this time as well. These retests function identically to normal Ability retests, but may be used in addition to Ability retests on a single test. Only one retest gained from this Gift can be used on a single test, however. Spending levels of *Ancestors* in this fashion does not diminish the Trait benefit gained upon activating this Gift. This Gift may only be used once per session, if that often, and the Garou must add a number of physical alterations to her appearance equal to her rating in *Ancestors*, reflecting how the Stargazer has literally become her ancestors through this Gift.

Mantra Gifts

The following Gifts are based upon mantras. Mantras are vocal expressions of the very fabric and tapestry of the cosmos, and while anyone can learn to speak a mantra, only a rare few learn the potential Gifts that are associated with them. These Gifts are predominantly practiced by the Stargazer Galliards of India, but any Stargazer can learn to use them.

• **Seed of Speech (Level One)** — The spoken mantra for this Gift is *Aum-Vak-Bija*. It represents the primal nature of speech and gives the Stargazer using this Gift a preternatural understanding of the underlying force behind all words and names. Merely by intoning the mantra and activating this Gift, the Garou is capable of harmonizing with the very fundamental nature of spoken sound and the knowledge that comes with it. This Gift is taught by an avatar of Cuckoo.

System: The player spends one Gnosis point after the Stargazer speaks the mantra. For the duration of the scene, the werewolf gains the ability to understand the basic subject/verb structure of all sentences spoken to him, regardless of the language used. For instance, "What are you doing here?" would translate (to the Stargazer) as "You do?"; or "Put down that idol," may translate to "You drop." This Gift only captures the most basic essence of a sentence spoken (the "seed"), but when being spoken to in a completely foreign tongue, this can make all the difference.

MET: *Basic* Gift. By speaking the mantra and spending a Gnosis Trait, the Garou understands the basic subject/verb structure of any sentences spoken in his presence for the rest of the scene. They may use the raised "L" gesture of *Linguistics*, though they should remember and relate their limited understanding to those they are communicating with.

• **Sound of Suffering (Level Two)** — The spoken mantra for this Gift is *Aum-Kama-Rudra*. Life is suffering. Among the Stargazers this is not a philosophy, this is fact. Once someone realizes that suffering is the dominating force within the universe, he can move past it onto a fuller, richer life — or so the theory goes. With this Gift, a Stargazer can inflict a temporary "realization of suffering" onto a single individual. The individual affected by this Gift is beset by a swell of sadness, and they can't help but break down into hitching, wracking sobs. For the duration of this power, the target is left feeling both empty of substance and full of the world's pain. This Gift is taught by both pain and rain-spirits.

System: The player spends a single Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty 6). The target is incapacitated for one turn per success rolled as she is afflicted by terrible sorrow and sobbing. The subject may defend if attacked, and she also may take action if circumstances are putting her own life at risk.

MET: *Basic* Gift. This Gift costs two Mental Traits, and requires a Social test (retest *Empathy*); in addition, the Stargazer must speak the mantra and ask the target about how much they understand the pain of the world. (They do not need to be heeded or even comprehended, but the question must still be asked.) Success means that the target is overcome with sadness and wracking sobs for a number of minutes/turns equal to the Stargazer's *Empathy* rating. They may defend themselves normally if attacked, or remove themselves from danger if need be, but otherwise they cannot move or initiate any aggressive action. This Gift may only be used on a target once per scene, and

should be roleplayed to the best of the target's ability for the duration.

• **Burning Fire-Mind (Level Three)** — The spoken mantra for this Gift is *Aum-Hana-Daha.* It signifies the burning, fiery nature of anger and wrath, and relates directly to a werewolf's usage of Rage. Rage, like fire, is an uncontrollable, all-consuming entity. It cannot be leashed or tamed, and can leave much damage in its wake. The Stargazers, as a rule, are not opposed to using Rage, but they understand that it can run rampant — and unmitigated Rage is a terrible weapon to behold. This Gift allows a Stargazer to punish other Garou for attempting to access this unmanageable source of power needlessly. Any opponent of the Stargazer feels the anger literally sear their flesh. This Gift is taught by a fire-spirit.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Primal-Urge (difficulty 6) and spends one Rage point. This Gift remains active for two turns per success rolled. Any Garou within ten yards of the Stargazer who spends Rage takes an automatic, unsoakable level of lethal damage per Rage point spent. If the roll to use this Gift botches, the Stargazer loses all of her temporary Rage points.

MET: *Intermediate* Gift. This Gift requires the expenditure of a Rage Trait and a Social test (retest *Primal-Urge*); if successful, all Garou within the Stargazer's Gnosis rating in paces take an automatic level of lethal damage for each Rage Trait they spend. This Gift lasts for a number of turns equal to the Stargazer's *Primal-Urge* rating, and does not differentiate between friend or foe — even the Stargazer herself is not immune. Armor does not protect against this damage, however, it will not kill a Garou — any Garou that would die from the damage received are instead rendered unconscious for the duration instead, though of course they may be further injured normally during this time. Note that while some tribes appreciate this Gift's value at quashing bursts of needless fury, exposing supposed friends and allies to this Gift's burn without a *very* good reason is likely to earn the Stargazer a number of enemies, if not also a corresponding loss of Renown.

• **Seeking the Void (Level Four)** — The spoken mantra for this Gift is *Aum-Ha-Sa-Kha-Prem.* The Umbra, also called the Mirror Lands, is a void empty of true matter and built of little more than the ephemeral whorls of spirit substance. Many Garou are reliant upon hard travel within the Umbra. They must find their destination and get to it via moon paths or sniffing out spirit tracks. Stargazers using this Gift have a somewhat easier time getting somewhere in the Mirror Lands — provided that another Garou or spirit is already there. Using this Gift takes the werewolf directly to the location of the chosen individual, no matter where they are at that moment. The Stargazer must be in the Umbra to use this Gift. It is taught by a shadow-spirit.

System: The Stargazer utilizing this Gift must speak the mantra while actually in the Umbra. She also must have with her some piece of the Garou she's "traveling" to, usually a part of the werewolf's body (a tuft of hair, a tooth, a claw) or one of the Garou's possessions (a weapon, an article of clothing). In the case of traveling to a specific spirit, the Stargazer can only travel to spirits she has literally battled with. (Though "battled" can be a battle of wits and intelligence, and doesn't necessarily need to be a combative conflict.) The player then rolls Wits + Enigmas. The difficulty for the roll is reliant upon the location of the target individual. If the target is in the Penumbra, it's difficulty 6. If the target is in the Near Umbra, difficulty 7. In the Deep Umbra, difficulty 8. And finally, in the Dark Umbra, difficulty 9.

MET: *Intermediate* Gift. A Stargazer using this Gift need only repeat the mantra and clutch some piece or valued possession of the Garou she seeks to find in the Umbra; in the case of spirits being sought after, only those that the Stargazer has personally bested in some form of competition may be targeted with this Gift. Provided these conditions are met, the Stargazer may make a Mental test (retest *Enigmas*) to find the safest, most direct route to her goal; at the Narrator's discretion, particularly long journeys may require several such tests over an appropriate period of time. The difficulty of this test depends on the location of the target individual — the Penumbra is six Traits, the Near Umbra is eight Traits, the Deep Umbra is ten Traits, and the Dark Umbra is twelve Traits.

• **Liberation of Flesh (Level Five)** — The spoken mantra for this Gift is *Aum-waha-guru-dha-yan.* Some Stargazers (particularly those among the Tranquil) posit that all flesh is weak, and like an anchor, it drags the spirit. Stargazers using this Gift find themselves "liberated" from their physical forms, becoming insubstantial and bodiless.

System: No roll is necessary to become incorporeal, but the player must spend a Gnosis point to reduce the Stargazer's physical form to an insubstantial one. When this Gift is activated, the Stargazer becomes quite literally like a silvery ghost of her physical body, and can be seen with a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7). The Stargazer may take no actions except for simple movement, and even that takes strong concentration. To move from one place to another, the player must roll Wits + Meditation (difficulty 7). Only one success is necessary for movement, but the shimmering ghostly form may only travel no

faster than the werewolf's usual walking speed. Failure means the character may not move; a botch on the roll to move is disastrous. A botch disrupts the Stargazer's concentration keeping her form non-corporeal, and it reduces her Gnosis pool to zero. The Stargazer may stay in this bodiless state for as long as she chooses, and may not be physically harmed by other physical creatures *or* spirits. To return to a corporeal, physical form, the Stargazer spends another Gnosis point and her ghostly form becomes immediately corporeal once again.

MET: *Advanced* Gift. By spending a standard action and a Gnosis Trait, the Stargazer may become completely insubstantial and largely invisible; only those that make a successful Mental test (retest *Alertness*) may detect the Stargazer while she is in this state. Neither spirits nor physical creatures can in any way harm a Stargazer in this form, and she is not affected by Gifts or attacks that target spirits either; the Storyteller has final say on whether or not a particular source can harm the Stargazer, but such hazards should be *extremely* rare or the essence of the Gift is lost. While in this state, the Stargazer may only travel from one location to another at a regular walking pace, though physical and spiritual obstacles pose no particular challenge to her either. Due to the intense concentration this requires, a Mental test (retest *Meditation*) against a difficulty of six is required to summon the requisite concentration to move; failure means the Stargazer does not go anywhere that turn. The Stargazer may return to physical form by spending another Gnosis Trait.

• **Thought-Form of the Twelve Ministers (Level Six)** — The spoken mantra for this Gift is *Aum-ka-la-rim-sa-ka-la-rim-ha-ka-la-rim.* This Gift allows a Stargazer to attain true spiritual balance for a single moment. In that moment, all extreme desires and impure emotions are blasted away by an unmitigated blast of the Self. A startling crackle of energy travels like lightning to each of the Stargazer's chakra points. It only lasts for a second, and then it is gone. But in its wake, the Stargazer is left empowered and burning with a halo of pale green light. There is only a handful of Stargazers who have ever been worthy enough to learn this Gift, and it can only be taught by an avatar of Chimera.

System: The player spends a single temporary point of Gnosis, Rage, *and* Willpower. For the remainder of the scene, the Garou gains a series of Trait bonuses: +2 to Perception, +3 to Enigmas, +3 to Empathy, and +2 to Brawl. There are two other benefits, as well. First, any Garou standing within ten feet of the Stargazer using this Gift find that their temporary Gnosis pools are suddenly refreshed. Also, this

Gift burns out any corruption that was contained in the werewolf grasping the power. Hence, any Wyrm-taint that the character had thus disappears.

MET: This mighty Gift requires a the expenditure of a Trait of Willpower, Gnosis and Rage to activate; for the remainder of the scene, the Stargazer becomes and impressive balance of martial skill and mental prowess. She is considered two Traits up on all Mental tests, and receives three additional levels of *Enigmas* and *Empathy*, as well as two additional levels of *Brawl* — these bonuses may cause her to exceed normal Trait and Ability limits. What's more, any other Garou standing within three paces of the Stargazer when this Gift is first activated have their Gnosis Traits immediately refreshed to their normal maximum, and the Stargazer using the Gift is automatically purged of any Wyrm-taint.

Camp Gifts

The Gifts below are guarded secrets, open only to those members of the respective "camps" that fostered them in the first place. These powers are meant to help Stargazers of different sects and sub-groups achieve whatever goal it is that separates them from the rest of their tribe.

Demon Eaters

The Demon Eaters (or, "The Heavenly Successors of the Demon-Eater") favor Gifts that lend weight and power to their ultimate goal, which is to rid the world of all demons. The Demon Eaters, perhaps more than any other camp, rely on their Gifts to aid them in their mission.

• **Sense the Demonic (Level One)** — The difference between a servitor of the Wyrm and a demon-possessed mortal is subtle. While most demons emanate perceptible Wyrm-taint, strangely some seem able to mask themselves and escape such notice. Plus, Sense Wyrm doesn't identify the nature of the taint, so the nature of the creature (that it's a demon) goes unknown until it's potentially too late. This Gift helps circumvent that problem. It doesn't provide a literal sense so much as a spiritual one — the eye in the Demon Eater's mind registers the disruption in the fabric of reality, and senses the demonic source. This Gift is taught by a chimerling.

System: The player rolls Perception + Occult. The difficulty is dependent upon the proximity and intensity of the demon (or demon-possessed victim). Sensing a single demon in the same room would be difficulty 6, sensing a demon across a busy city street would be 7, and detecting a demon's infernal influence after the creature has already left would be a difficulty 8.

MET: This Gift functions exactly as the Gift: *Sense Wyrm*, save that it allows the detection and identification of any demons and demonic energies in the area. While *Sense Wyrm* can also be used to detect demons, it will not identify them as anything other than another generic source of "Wyrm taint," and so many Stargazers learn this Gift if they expect to see much battle with the demonic, in order to better and more swiftly identify their true foe.

• **Reverie of the Kol-Kin (Level Two)** — Demons are malicious tricksters bent on chaos. Their souls have been corrupted by the Wyrm so badly, there's little real humanity left inside, regardless of how they appear on the outside. They can't be trusted. They can't be left alone. This Gift helps to trap them and keep them still for a time. The Stargazer's eyes become pale mirrors, glowing faintly even in daylight. Any demon looking into the Stargazer's eyes is held transfixed, unable to move or speak. It's said that this ability was passed down from the group's progenitor, Zhong Kui, who used it to hold one demon at bay while his pack eased in for the kill. This Gift is taught by a Luné.

System: The player spends a single Gnosis point. No roll is necessary to activate the Gift. The Stargazer's eyes become reflective, and any demon (or demon-possessed individual) looking into the Stargazer's eyes are held in a kind of trance. (Note that the subject cannot be *Bane*-possessed; only demons and their vessels are affected by this power.) The demon is allowed a single Willpower roll (difficulty 8) in the beginning to resist the allure of the werewolf's eyes. This Gift is active as long as the Stargazer holds the gaze (blinking doesn't disrupt it) or until the demon is attacked. This Gift only works on one demon or demon-possessed individual at a time.

Werewolves and Demons

Just because we say "demon," we don't necessarily mean the creatures from **Demon: The Fallen**. In **Werewolf** cosmology, demons as Judeo-Christian fallen angels don't necessarily exist. However, in the Stargazers' Asian animist tradition, demons are thought of quite differently. To some Stargazers, demons are simply evil spirits who exist freely in the world to do harm, and other times are capable of possessing unwitting (or willing) mortals. Left up to interpretation, this sounds an awful lot like Banes and fomori, and may be understood as such. It's ultimately up to the Storyteller which interpretation is most favorable for the game, whether it's actual characters from **Demon: The Fallen** or simply another twist on an ages-old, Wyrm-faced enemy.

MET: *Basic* Gift. By spending a Gnosis Trait and making eye contact with a demon or demon-possessed individual, the Stargazer essentially paralyzes the creature — it cannot move or take any action, even speak, so long as the Stargazer maintains her gaze. A demon is allowed a single Willpower test against the Stargazer's Willpower or Gnosis rating (whichever is higher) to attempt to break free; failure means it is trapped for the duration. Attacking or otherwise directly endangering the demon immediately cancels this Gift, and it cannot be re-attempted on such opponents for the rest of the scene. A Stargazer may only target one individual with this Gift at one time.

The Sacred Thread

The *ksatriyas* of the Sacred Thread camp of the Stargazers tend to focus on Gifts that lend them the ability to more effectively pass along wisdom to their students and Gifts that aid their battle prowess in protecting their charges.

• **Word-to-Weapon (Level Two)** — The warrior-teacher caste of the Sacred Thread is able to focus in on the mystic power underlying each and every word. Even a *ksatriya* without a weapon may conjure one using nothing more than the sound of his own voice. This Gift is taught by a wind-spirit.

System: The Stargazer invokes a prayer (taking a full turn to do so). The player then spends a Gnosis point and rolls Wits + Linguistics (difficulty 6). The first success conjures a ghostly, translucent scimitar out of thin air. The moon-curved blade has Strength base damage (lethal), with a difficulty of 7 to hit. Every two successes past the first, however, on the roll to activate this Gift increases the weapon's damage roll for that weapon. If the player rolls three successes, it creates an opaque blade (made essentially of icy wind) that does Strength +1 lethal damage, with a difficulty of 7 to hit. The weapon lasts until the end of the scene, and then it disappears into a cloud of dust.

MET: *Basic* Gift. By spending a full turn in prayer (defensive actions only) and spending a Gnosis Trait, the Stargazer may conjure a ghostly scimitar out of thin air and into her hand. This blade is otherwise considered the same as an ordinary sword for purposes of Bonus Traits, damage and so on. Only the Stargazer herself may wield it, however, and if it is fully dropped or disarmed by any means, it vanishes and this Gift must be used again. The sword remains for one scene otherwise.

• **The Teacher's Ease (Level Two)** — The Stargazers of the Sacred Thread are teachers, first and forever. They hold a great love of sharing information and enlightening others to knowledge, and those with this Gift may find their students a little more "enlightened" than others. With it, a *ksatriya* may actually open a student's mind a little further than it already was, allowing the learner to absorb more information, more quickly. This Gift is taught by a Stargazer ancestor-spirit.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Expression (difficulty is 10 minus the student's Intelligence score). Each success gives the learner a number of bonus dice on a roll featuring a specific Ability. The learner may not use these bonus dice on any Ability, however; he may only use it on a single Ability of the *ksatriya's* choosing. If the Sacred Thread Stargazer demands that the dice must go toward a roll involving the Investigation Ability, then the learner has no choice but to assign those dice to a single roll involving Investigation.

MET: *Basic* Gift. By teaching a suitable lesson and making a Social test (retest *Expression*, student cannot relent) with her pupil, the Stargazer may put her student up a number of Traits equal to her *Expression* rating on a single test involving an Ability of her choosing. The student chooses when these bonus Traits are applied, though he must use them on the Ability specified when this Gift is used. Multiple uses concerning a single Ability are not cumulative, and a student cannot receive more applications of this Gift at any given time than he has Willpower Traits or that the Gift user has *Expression* levels, whichever is lower. This Gift cannot be used on the Stargazer herself, though it can be used for an Ability that the student actually possesses at an equal or higher level than the *ksatriya* herself has mastered — sometimes the innocent eyes of the less experienced spot new ways of doing things even old masters had yet to notice. This Gift lasts for the rest of the session or until the bonus Traits are used.

• **Eyes of Ignorance (Level Five)** — The *ksatriya* using this Gift can look into another's eyes and, for a period of time, literally strip them of their knowledge, leaving them ignorant and empty of ability. This Gift can be taught by an owl-spirit.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Gnosis (difficulty is the target's Willpower). Success on the roll allows the Garou to intrinsically "know" the target's Knowledge (and the accompanying dots in each Knowledge). Also, for each success, the *ksatriya* may subtract two dots from the target's Knowledge traits. This Gift lasts for one day, at which point the *ksatriya* loses the gained Knowledge points and the target regains the ones "lost."

MET: *Advanced* Gift. By spending a Gnosis Trait and making a Gnosis test against the target's Willpower, the Stargazer may subtract one knowledge-related Ability level for each permanent Gnosis Trait she has. What's more, for the duration of the Gift the

Stargazer gains the Ability levels the target loses, up to her normal Ability maximums (extra levels beyond that limit are simply lost). Some examples of the kind of Abilities that can be targeted by this Gift include *Academics*, *Computer*, *Enigmas*, *Law*, *Lore*, *Medicine*, *Occult*, *Science*, and *Survival*; more physical or intuitive Abilities such as *Athletics*, *Brawl*, *Dodge*, etc. cannot be stolen with this Gift. The Storyteller has the final word on what Abilities can or cannot be targeted in this fashion. This Gift lasts for the rest of the session, at which time the target immediately regains their lost Abilities and the Stargazer immediately loses them.

Trance Runners

The Trance Runners rely on their lithe and airy physical forms to complete their mission as cosmic messengers. Their Gifts reflect such reliance.

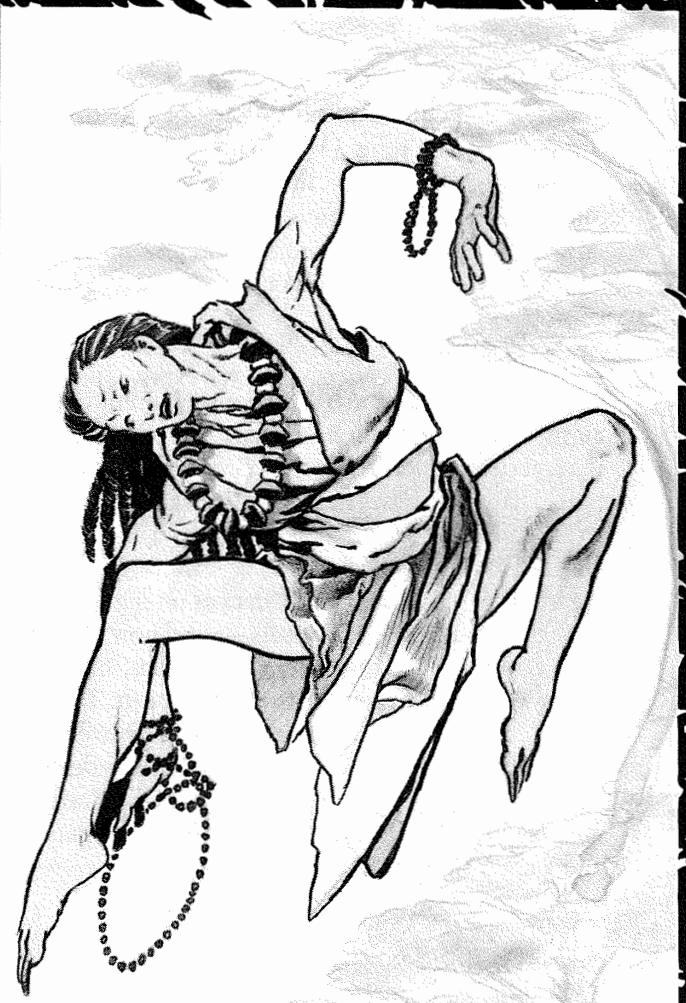
• **Bird Bones (Level Three)** — Trance Runners are known for being notoriously light. Their bodies, little more than bones and tightly-corded muscle, can move fast and flexible partly due to their legendary "hollow" bones. It allows them to run quickly over almost any surface.

System: The Trance Runner is able to run upon almost any surface without penalty. The roll is always Dexterity + Athetics, but the difficulty is variable depending on the danger, complexity, or frailty of the surface.

Surface Type	Difficulty
Water	5
Snow	6
Lava	7
Razors	8
Wall	9
Ceiling	10

MET: *Intermediate* Gift. This Gift allows the Stargazer to run across just about any surface without suffering any undue penalty, so long as they do not slow down from a run while crossing. Most of the time this Gift is automatic, provided these conditions are met, but at the Narrator's discretion truly hazardous surfaces such as lava or outlandish ones such as the ceiling may require a Physical test (retest *Athletics*) to cross successfully.

• **Seven Mile Leap (Level Three)** — The name of this Gift is a bit of a misnomer, since it doesn't technically allow a Trance-Runner to leap seven miles up into the air. What it does do, however, is effectively increase the tautness and tension of her muscles, making her a light and powerful adversary. She can move quickly, jump to obscene heights, and land safely. This Gift is taught by any bird-spirit.



System: Once learned, this Gift is always "on." It grants the Trance-Runner allows her to *triple* the distance she can jump (**Werewolf**, pg. 197).

MET: *Intermediate* Gift. Once learned, this Gift allows the Stargazer to triple the distance she can leap, and grants her a free automatic retest on all non-combat tests involving jumping.

Rites

Stargazer tradition includes many ceremonies and customs, many of which translate directly into supernatural rites. Much of what a Stargazer learns is exemplified through these rites. Rites aren't merely a means to an end, they aren't tools meant to gain some new ability, skill, or power. They're exacting traditions meant to give the Stargazer a deeper understanding of herself, her tribe, her ancestors — and how all of that connects with the Emerald Mother. Yes, they often come with boons granted from the spirits; but even without these fortunate blessings, the Stargazer would still perform the rites because they are her duty as a member of the tribe. Most rites among the Stargazers are not secret, as they are meant for all to understand and (when they are ready) to perform.

Rites of Accord

The Rite of Meeting

Level One

The population of living Stargazers is growing thin, and as such, many of the tribe consider themselves fortunate when encountering a new (or previously unmet) Stargazer. This rite, known in India as the "Rite of *Namah-te*" and in China as the "Rite of *Gong Xi*," is meant to allow two tribe members to greet one another with proper respect. The rite is a traditional greeting that's been used for many centuries. Two Stargazers meeting for the first time place the flat of their palms against their chest, and bow their heads at one another. They hold the bow for as long as necessary, and then each Garou takes a small smear of ash or soil and anoints the other's forehead with it. Finally, both Stargazers utter a prayer to Gaia. The meanings to this ritual meeting are many. It is a wish for extended friendship, but in it is also the unspoken wish to have both minds joined in service to both Gaia (the Emerald Mother) and the Jade Emperor. Both Garou are equal in the eyes of those two cosmic forces, even if they are not technically equal in rank. In this meeting, egos are set aside and the two are — however briefly — conjoined in the service of Gaia.

System: A Stargazer may only enact this rite when meeting another Stargazer for the first time. If the two have met previously, the rite may be performed, but without any spiritual benefits. Each Stargazer bows his head for a number of minutes equal to the *other* Stargazer's Rank. When the rite is completed, the player rolls Charisma + Rituals (difficulty 6). If 1-2 successes are rolled, the Stargazer gains a single die on any Social roll involving the encountered Garou. However, if 3 or more successes are rolled, the Stargazer also gains a Willpower point alongside the bonus die.

MET: *Basic* Rite. Once the rite as described has been performed, the ritemaster must make a standard Social test (retest *Rituals*, the other Garou may not relent); if successful, she is considered two Traits up on all friendly Social tests with the other Garou for the rest of the session. This rite may only be used when meeting another Stargazer for the first time. At the Narrator's discretion, successfully using this rite when meeting a particularly prominent or spiritually significant Stargazer to the ritemaster may also grant her a temporary Willpower Trait.

Banishment of the Self

Level Four

This rite allows a Stargazer to dampen her own ego so she may give aid to those closest to her (typically her pack or *sentai*). The werewolf meditates for an hour beneath the moon and continually recites the following in whatever language she chooses: "I give my body to the hungry, my blood to the thirsty, my skin to the naked, and my bones as fuel to those who suffer cold. I give my good fortune to the unlucky, and may the breath of my life restore the dying. Shame on me if I draw back from this sacrifice! Shame on all who hesitate to accept it!" Those she chooses to aid from this ritual find their spirits lifted and find a renewed sharpness to their minds.

System: The player rolls Strength + Rituals (difficulty 7) and must spend a Willpower point for each werewolf within her pack or *sentai* that she intends to aid with this rite. If she desires to extend the benefits of this rite to another outside pack or *sentai*, she must spend two Willpower points per individual not in her pack. For the next 24-hour period, those "gifted" with the advantages from this rite can ignore all wound penalties. At the end of that 24-hour period, the Stargazer who performed the rite *must* sleep for a full eight hours. Until she does, she acts at +1 difficulty to all rolls.

MET: *Advanced* Rite. By meditating for an hour in her breed form and succeeding at a Physical test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of five Traits plus one Trait for each member of her pack/*sentai*, the Stargazer may render herself and her packmates immune to all wound penalties short of death for the rest of the session/day. Each packmate protected by this rite costs her a Willpower Trait as well, paid when the rite is completed. She may attempt to include non-packmates in this rite, but

each such individual adds three Traits to the difficulty of the rite, and costs her two Willpower Traits instead of just one. Any interruption to her meditation forces her to begin the rite again — she must remain out of contact with everyone during her period of meditation, in and out of game. After this rite's duration passes, the Stargazer can do nothing except sleep for the next eight hours, and has a one-Trait penalty on all actions taken during the following downtime regardless.

Thaipusam

Level Three

The rite called "Thaipusam" is an act of consecration meant to separate a Stargazer from the profane world and officially become part of the greater sacred sphere. Few Stargazers practice it; it's mostly prominent among the Stargazers of India, despite the fact that its origins actually lie among the native peoples of Malaysia. At its roots, Thaipusam is an act of ritual piercing. The Stargazer, after washing his hands in both milk and honey, then pierces his own flesh to insert a ring. While chanting the universal mantra (*aum*), salt is rubbed in the wound to heighten the pain and ensure that it won't heal over immediately. The ring itself needn't be made of any specific material, though may Stargazers favor simple rings of steel, jade, or hematite, though some decorate their bodies with more ornate trimmings. The bodily location of the piercing also is insignificant. Many pierce their ears, lips, nipples, and some even go so far as to pierce genitals, the flesh around the throat, or bunches of pinched skin around the forehead. Many elder Stargazers can be seen with countless rings adorning their scarred bodies.

System: The player rolls Stamina + Rituals (difficulty 7). If the roll is successful, the ritemaster takes a single, unsoakable aggravated level of damage. For the month following the enacting of the rite, the Stargazer may freely step in and out of the Umbra without a roll. Merely concentrating on the cleansing pain of the *Thaipusam* rite allows her to ease between worlds with nary a thought. This rite may only be performed (for its benefit) once a year.

MET: *Intermediate* Rite. By performing a suitable ceremony and making a Physical test (retest *Rituals*), the Stargazer immediately suffers a level of aggravated damage, which cannot be blocked by armor or any other form of defense. Provided these conditions are met, for a full lunar month afterward she may step in and our of the Umbra without a need to make a Gnosis test; all she requires is a reflective surface. If the chronicle's sessions are generally held too far apart for this rite's duration to be very useful, the Storyteller may rule that the normal duration is instead changed to a set number of sessions instead; generally between two and four sessions is sufficient. The damage incurred by this rite may be healed normally without any consequence to the rite.

Rite of Rebalancing

Level Three

This variation on the Rite of Renunciation has been all but lost — though some Stargazers know it and see it as the only means to bolster their tribe's numbers. By means of this rite, a Garou of another tribe loses his tribal affiliation and instead becomes a Stargazer in blood, if not by birth. The Garou wishing to become a Stargazer may not perform this rite herself; it must instead be performed upon her by an able and willing ritemaster. In this rite, the ritemaster must take the Garou beneath the new moon and together they must stand in a body of running water (a creek, stream, or river will do). The ritemaster must, with a claw, etch the Stargazer glyph into the Garou's body, and let the blood mingle with the flowing water below. The Garou mustn't let this wound heal right away, and instead must allow it to scab over and become a natural scar. After seven days has passed, the Garou is now a full-blooded member of the Stargazer tribe regardless of her tribe of origin.

System: The rite is performed according to the description above. The player rolls Charisma + Rituals (difficulty of the Rage + 2 of the changing Garou, to a maximum of 10). The river washes away a Garou's tribe, and it also removes any semblance of Rank. Garou with this ritual performed willingly upon them begin at Rank 1. The Garou may keep the Gifts she has learned from her old tribe, but she is unlikely to learn any new ones except under very special circumstances. However, Stargazer Gifts are now available to her. The Garou may never return to her old tribe, nor will she ever gain favor again with her past tribal totem.

MET: *Intermediate* Rite. By performing a cleansing ceremony and making a Social test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of two Traits plus the changing Garou's Rage rating; the Stargazer may wash away her subject's former allegiances and welcome her into the Stargazer tribe. Garou subjected to this rite effectively become Cliath once more, of the Stargazer tribe — while they retain any Gifts learned from their old tribe, it is extremely unlikely their former tribe's spirits will be willing to teach the deserter any new ones, and he can never go back regardless of the circumstances. Only willing Garou may accept this rite.

Caern Rites

Rite of the Beating Heart

Level Five

These days, Stargazer caerns are particularly vulnerable places. There is, however, a rather perilous Stargazer

rite that some have learned in case their caern is threatened and beyond the ability of the guardians to protect it. With this rite, a Stargazer may take the powerful heart of the caern into her *own* heart and secret it away from the place so its power may be planted anew, or at least added to the strength of an already existing caern. In performing the rite, a single Stargazer must first successfully perform the Rite of the Opened Caern. Once this is complete, the werewolf must then consume some part of the land surrounding the caern — this may be soil from the ground, water from a lake, or even pieces of brick or concrete if it's an urban caern. Finally, the Stargazer must plead with the totem spirit of the caern, begging and cajoling until finally the caern heart is relinquished for a time, taken deep into the Stargazer's own still-beating organ. But this rite carries with it an exhausting price; the Stargazer who takes this burden unto herself will die soon after performing the rite, as her flesh is simply too frail to handle the potent energies that accompany a caern's own spirit. Her time to affix the caern's heart back to the flesh of the Emerald Mother is severely limited. Knowledge of this rite is exceedingly rare.

System: As directed, the Stargazer must first successfully open the caern using the Rite of the Opened Caern. After consuming some part of the caern, the player must roll for the Stargazer to engage in a contest of pleas and supplications versus the caern's totem spirit. The player rolls the ritemaster's Charisma + Performance, with a difficulty of the caern's rating + 4. Even a single success allows the caern heart to be "carried" by the Stargazer, but every success increases the time the Stargazer may "carry" the caern with her. One success allows the Stargazer to hold the caern spirit within for a number of *hours* equal to 10 minus the caern's rating. Every success beyond the first on the roll allows for one full day to be added onto the time allowed. If the Stargazer attempts to keep the caern within past this "time limit," she takes one unsoakable aggravated level of damage per hour until she dies. If the Stargazer dies, the caern dies and cannot be recovered.

"Dropping" the caern heart into a new location requires that a number of *permanent* Gnosis points be spent equal to the caern's rating. If the Stargazer does not have the requisite Gnosis to spend, she may take two aggravated levels per one Gnosis point missing. She must still spend at least *one* permanent Gnosis point in this manner, however, or the caern is not re-anchored to a new location. At any time during the "carrying" of the caern's heart, the Stargazer *may* simply reject the caern spirit and eject it from her form without any roll or Gnosis expenditure — but this unequivocally destroys the caern, and it may never return.

MET: *Advanced* Rite. After opening the caern and consuming some part of it, the Stargazer may plead with the caern totem to permit this rite, ultimately entering a Social test (retest *Performance*) against a difficulty equal to the caern's rating plus four Traits. If successful, the Stargazer may "carry" the caern's heart within her for a number of scenes/hours equal to her *Rituals* rating — each increment beyond that inflicts a level of aggravated damage, which cannot be prevented or healed by any means until the caern has been released. If the Stargazer dies before releasing the caern, it dies with her and cannot be recovered. At the Storyteller's discretion, for dramatic purposes the duration of this rite may be increased to days instead of hours with the expenditure of a permanent Willpower Trait. "Dropping" the caern heart into a new location requires the expenditure of a number of *permanent* Gnosis Traits equal to the caern's rating; if the Stargazer does not have the requisite amount of Gnosis, she may make up the difference at a cost of two levels of aggravated damage per Gnosis Trait missing. She may do this even if the damage kills her, essentially sacrificing her life to ensure that the caern continues in its new location.

At any time while "carrying" the caern, the Stargazer may voluntarily reject the caern spirit and eject it from her form without any tests or Gnosis expenditure, but this immediately destroys the caern, and it may never return. Needless to say, such a vile act is perhaps the greatest treason a Garou can perform, and unless the Stargazer can justify the action *extremely* well (not to mention quickly), she is likely to face an extremely gruesome death at the hands of her fellow Garou. On the other hand, no form of control or persuasion (supernatural or otherwise) can force the Stargazer to give up the caern against her will — all such attempts automatically fail. She must do it of her own free will, for better or worse.

Rites of Death

Vigor of the Departed

Level Two

Two things are important to many Stargazers: the veneration of their ancestry and the tamping down of uncontrollable Rage. This ritual is an answer, somewhat, to both of these presumed Stargazer "duties."

With this rite (which can only be performed under the werewolf's own birth moon) a Stargazer calls upon his ancestors to help him understand some mastery (however temporary) over his anger, wrath, and fury. The Garou must sit in the middle of an empty room, or if outdoors must perform the rite where there are no people within sight. Then, the Stargazer must concoct a makeshift shrine to his ancestors, cobbled together of items that were important to his ancestors or somehow symbolize the departed. Finally, the Garou must also place two slips of paper, one in each palm. On these slips of paper, called *kangshin*, there

must be written a list of her ancestor's names. From there, the Stargazer meditates upon her antecedents, and seeks enlightenment from those who have come before him.

Come morning, the werewolf will find that his Rage has been lessened. The primal fury within has been dampened, and up until the next dawn of his auspice moon, the Stargazer can try to deny any frenzy with a simple memory of her ancestor's wisdom. The vigor of the departed is thus transferred, for a short time, to the Garou.

System: The Stargazer must perform the rite as described above. The player rolls Charisma + Rituals (difficulty 8). If even one success is obtained, the rite is successful. When successful, the Stargazer can attempt to deny any potential frenzy that may happen until the next rise of his auspice moon. The player may re-roll any failed frenzy check called for during this period; the results of the second roll stand. If the roll to perform the rite fails, nothing happens. If the roll botches, the Stargazer enters an instant frenzy that lasts for the remainder of the scene. This rite only functions when performed under the Stargazer's own birth moon.

Buying Back the Soul

Level Two

Also called the "Rite of *Lalu-chilu*," this rite is meant to help a Stargazer track the next incarnation of another of his tribe. Incarnations are important to the Stargazers — when one dies, it's believed that, while their spirit may linger for a time, the Emerald Mother returns them quickly to the world to do her work once again. The quandary is then, so why aren't there the same number of Stargazers now as there were in the beginning? The problem is, new Garou aren't being born. The body is like a vessel, and while in the womb it sits, vacant of the ancestral incarnation. But the biology is already determined. While the ancestral spirit may "become" the new child, that new child is more than likely *not* a Stargazer werewolf. Hence, the incarnations are still being born, but into the bodies of kin, not Garou.

To perform this rite, the ritemaster must be present at the death of the Stargazer whose soul he wishes to track. Once the Garou has departed, this rite must be performed within twelve hours, or it will provide no answers. The one performing the rite mixes some of the fallen Garou's blood in a bowl with equal parts milk. The liquid must be stirred by the ritemaster's own fingers or hands, and then a piece of cake or bread must be soaked thoroughly in the mixture. The ritemaster eats the bread or cake, and when next he sleeps, he will be granted a vision of the newborn meant to house the next incarnation of the dead Stargazer. He will also be given a location, but no name or other pertinent information. Many Garou performing this will then seek out the newborn caught up in this transmigration of souls in the hopes that a kin-fetch spirit will be there and the child will be Garou.

System: The Stargazer must enact the rite as described above, with all conditions present. The player rolls Perception + Rituals, and the difficulty of the roll is the departed Garou's permanent Rage score. The greater the successes, the longer the vision. This allows the ritemaster to more clearly see details of the identity (or other pertinent information) regarding the child. At the Storyteller's behest, the player can roll a Perception + Investigation roll, with the difficulty being 10 minus the number of successes gained on the roll to perform the rite. This roll can allow the Stargazer to pick up on key details that may help her further track the child. Note that the presence of this rite does not guarantee that any given Stargazer will undergo a second incarnation; if all Stargazers reincarnated, the tribe would have no ancestor-spirits.

MET: *Basic* Rite. This rite must be enacted exactly as described above, with all conditions present; the Stargazer then makes a Mental test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty of the departed Garou's Rage rating. If successful, the Stargazer learns a number of facts about the child equal to her *Rituals* rating, plus one additional piece of information per Mental Trait she is willing to spend. At the Storyteller's discretion, the Stargazer may also make successive Mental tests (retest *Investigation*) to further track the child if this rite is successful, though it should be noted that this rite does not act as a faultless homing device, simply a collection of visions and information that make it easier to track the child. Note also that this rite does not guarantee a Stargazer will be given a second incarnation, though if she doesn't this rite will sense that fact as well.

Mystic Rites

Rite of Knowing

Level Two

The Stargazers, ever on a quest to answer the riddles of the cosmos, often turn to divination to puzzle out some of the more oblique conundrums of the universe — sometimes to even solve those questions that haven't yet been asked. There are many forms of divination available to Stargazers (or to anybody, really). Sciomancy is divination by shadows or darkness. Divination by smoke is called Capnomancy. Onomancy is the divination by the letters in a person's name. Tephramancy is divination by ashes, catoptromancy is divination by mirrors, and austromancy is divination using the wind as a guide. There are other popular divination tools, as well. The chosen form of divination ultimately doesn't matter, only that the Stargazer uses it and believes in it. The Stargazer lays out her divination tools as proper (which may involve throwing bones, dice, or standing on a peak

and examining the winds). The items before her then literally become infused with their spiritual counterparts. Dice may begin rolling of their own accord, the winds may begin blowing and whispering in the Stargazer's ear, and ashes may hang suspended in the air and reveal a shadowy face. Secret truths are imparted to the Stargazer, though they are not particularly clear at first.

System: The ritemaster rolls Wits + Rituals (difficulty 7). She must perform the divination for at least the scope of an entire scene. Each success on the roll to perform the rite allows her to "collect" an additional Enigmas die that may be used at a later time. These added bonus dice do not need to be used all at once. (For instance, Matthias Heavens-Turning performs the rite and achieves four successes with translate into added dice for later Enigmas rolls. The next day he is trying to solve a particularly frustrating riddle given to him by his mentor, so he uses three of the four dice then. The following night he is stargazing, seeking truth about his own mission from the celestial bodies, and he adds his final bonus die to the Enigmas roll called for by the Storyteller.) The additional dice, if unused after 24 hours, go away. A Stargazer can only perform this rite once in a given week, and thus may not accumulate further bonuses by performing this rite several times in a row.

MET: *Basic* Rite. By performing divinatory feats for a scene and making a Mental test (retest *Rituals*), the Stargazer may acquire a number of bonus Traits equal to her *Rituals* rating plus two Traits per Rank of the ritemaster. These bonus Traits may only be applied to tests involving the *Enigmas* Ability, though they need not all be used on the same test if she desires. Another Garou or kin may benefit from this rite at the ritemaster's desire, but they must be present during the entire divinatory process and possess at least one level of the *Enigmas* Ability for this rite to be of any use to them. This rite may only be performed once per session, and multiple uses are not cumulative.

Rite of the Seed of Desire

Level Three

Desire, in and of itself, is unavoidable. Everybody wants something, and few Stargazers deny this. However, many Stargazers also openly deny their own desires, giving in only to the beneficial desires of others (or the desires of the world). Lust, greed, gluttony — these traditional "sins" are also the seeds of desire that afflict all. Stargazers would seem the model of desire denial, and many of them are. Unfortunately, however, this repression also lends itself to the theory that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and sometimes tamping down one's own desires causes them to pop up later at twice the strength. The longer one denies, sometimes the harder it is to deny the sweet succor of *want*.

This ritual helps curtail that, to a degree. When performed, it literally gives spiritual form to a Stargazer's desires, in the form of an Urge-Spirit. In the Umbra, around the Stargazer, the Urge-Spirit manifests and can thus be communicated with, defeated, or even bound into a fetish. If the spirit is thus diminished, so are the Stargazer's prevalent "bad" desires. This rite is only performed on those Stargazers found *truly* desirous of negative things, however. For instance, a Stargazer with a bad chocolate habit or unrequited love in his heart doesn't usually count as one who is besieged by negative urges. Only those Stargazers who are plagued by grievous desires (or who have already given into them) are the subject of this rite. A Stargazer who is addicted to pain medication (or, alternatively, pain) is a good choice, as is a Stargazer with a dangerous love of money, women, or alcohol.

The ritemaster must spend at least eight hours in the company of the "afflicted." After the eight hours is complete, the ritemaster must speak the mantra of desire (*Aum-Klim*) over the subject before blowing bone dust in the subject's face.

System: The rite must be performed as above. The player rolls Charisma + Rituals. The difficulty begins at 10, and is reduced by the number of Willpower points spent. Both the ritemaster *and* the subject of the rite can spend Willpower to reduce the difficulty of this roll. The successes achieved determine the temperament and demeanor of the Urge-spirit that manifests according to the following results:

Successes	Effects
1	Spirit comes eventually and is initially hostile
2	Spirits manifests quickly, but is still initially hostile
3	Spirit comes immediately and is neutral
4	Spirit comes immediately and is passively benign
5	Spirit comes immediately and is friendly

If the roll botches, there are disastrous consequences. The Urge-spirit doesn't manifest, but becomes Wyrm taint that afflicts both subject and ritemaster.

If the Urge-spirit is successfully summoned and dealt with, the subject is "clean" of the negative desire (although it may grow strong again if unchecked). If the spirit isn't successfully dealt with and is allowed to escape and return "home" to the Stargazer at the end of the scene, the subject loses one point of Wisdom renown, and the ritemaster loses two. The Urge-Spirit has the following Traits:

Willpower 7, Rage 9, Gnosis 5, Essence 20-30

Charms: Materialize, Blast, Corruption

MET: *Intermediate* Rite. After performing the rite as described, the ritemaster must make a Social test (retest *Rituals*), against a difficulty of twelve Traits — each Willpower Trait spent by the ritemaster or the subject of the rite reduces this difficulty by one Trait. If successful, the ritemaster must immediately make three Simple Tests (retest *Rituals*) — if she wins all three tests, the Urge-spirit appears and is friendly. If she wins at least one but not all three tests, the Urge-spirit appears and is neutral. If she fails all three tests, the Urge-spirit is actively hostile to their intentions for the rest of the scene. Once the spirit appears, the ritemaster and the subject must find some way to successfully deal with it and the desires it represents — bargaining, riddle contests, reasoned debate, etc. Simply attacking the spirit is considered uncouth in the extreme, and the rite is considered a failure if the best the Stargazer can think of is to try to thump on her manifested urges. Likewise, none outside of the the ritemaster and the subject can interfere. If the spirit can be successfully dealt with by the end of the scene, the Stargazer is freed of the base desire (though it may recur if she is not careful), and both Garou gain in Wisdom Renown; if the spirit is not handled appropriately by the end of the scene, it re-enters the Stargazer and both Garou lose Wisdom Renown. Needless to say, the Spirit Keeper should be alerted to this rite's use, preferably well in advance so that he has time to learn about the desire in question and prepare a suitably terrifying embodiment of the Stargazer's own inner corruption.

Punishment Rites

Pilgrimage of Non-Being

Level Four

This rite is forced upon a Stargazer who has committed a grievous sin against sept or tribe. It is reserved for one who has brought deep shame to himself and others. The Stargazer's hands are bound, and he is lead over a period of months to a number of Stargazer holy places. At each caern, the offending Garou must eat ashes while the caern guardians condemn and then ignore the Stargazer. At the final caern, upon completing this grim pilgrimage, the Stargazer's entire identity and memory fall away, toppling like a house of cards that can never be rebuilt. He becomes *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, unable to regain the most simple and intimate of memories — not even his own name.

Most of the tribe views this rite as the utmost of punishments, but a rare few view it as a reward. Some believe that one of the highest states of being is actually a state of *non*-being, and they seek to have this rite performed upon them so that their souls may transcend. There is an even lesser held belief that this rite is useful for curing Harano; however, to make that worthwhile, one would have to find a way to allow the old memories and identity to resurface after the rite is completed, but as yet, nobody has come forth with a means to make that happen.

System: The ritemaster must travel with the Stargazer to be punished, and must escort him to a number of caerns equal to the offender's Rage score. The punished must be taken to the very heart of each caern, where each guardian congregates, aiding in the ritual as defined above. Once this pilgrimage is completed and all caerns have been visited accordingly, the player rolls Charisma + Rituals roll (difficulty of the offender's current Rank + 4). If successful, the punished Garou loses all Renown, and must start anew. He also loses his identity and all the memories associated with it. All other Traits, however, remain the same. If this rite fails, it's assumed to be a sign from the Emerald Mother that the offending Stargazer can be redeemed by other means. A botch on this roll means that the ritemaster loses five points of Wisdom, and the offending Garou loses nothing (including his memory).

MET: *Advanced* Rite. After traveling to a number of caerns as described above, the ritemaster must make a Social test (retest *Rituals*) against a difficulty equal to the offender's Rank plus four Traits. If successful, the punished Garou loses all Renown and Rank, and must begin anew, with all memories of his old identity lost along with his reputation. His Traits remain the same, however, though he is unable to use any Gifts of higher Rank and must re-learn them when he has reached the appropriate Rank once more. (These cost one less Experience Trait to re-learn, however.) A failure on the test to perform this rite is generally believed to indicate that the offender can be redeemed by other means. Needless to say, due to the involved nature of this rite and the number of locations it requires, it is best handled during downtime, and the Storyteller is highly encouraged to make it as memorable as possible — this may well be the offending Stargazer's last hurrah, in this identity at least.

Minor Rites

Tea Ceremony

The Stargazer tea ceremony is a both a social occasion and a meditation practice. It allows a Stargazer to center herself, both through uncomplicated conversation and through the calming simplicity of drinking hot tea.

System: The Stargazer must engage in the tea ceremony with at least one other person (they need not be a Garou) once a day for an entire lunar cycle. Should the Stargazer do so, she gains an extra die on all rolls involving understanding the motivations and desires of others. If the Garou misses even a single day's ceremony, she must start anew during the next lunar cycle.

Ancestor Veneration

As has been stated, Stargazers are often closer to their forebears and spiritual ancestors than most other Garou. They tend to erect and maintain sometimes simple, other times elaborate shrines to their antecedents, hoping to gain favor from them and elevate them above their once-living stations. Many Stargazers sit at these constructed shrines and pray in an effort to venerate their ancestors, partially to honor them, and partially to gain a greater connection to them.

System: The Stargazer's shrine must be composed of items appropriate to their ancestors — ancestral items, pictures, writings, or anything else that elicits an honorable and wise memory of them. If the Stargazer worships and prays at the shrine for at least an hour, every day, for a month, he may reroll one die on any Ancestors roll (the second result stands, however) provided he makes an effort to continue venerating his ancestors daily.

Merits and Flaws

Mewa Birthmarks (1-pt. Merit)

Your body is decorated with small brown or pink birthmarks, each one no larger than a penny. They typically show up on one's back. These birthmarks, known in India as *mewas*, are considered "holy" and those bearing such marks are afforded honor. The marks are also used in some forms of divination, and they're often similar to star patterns or constellations. Those with these marks have an extra die on all Social rolls involving Stargazer Theurges. This Merit may *not* be taken by a metis Stargazer with the "Birthmarks" deformity.

MET: You are considered two Traits up on all friendly Social tests with Stargazer Theurges, even if they have yet to see your birthmarks — they simply are more likely to be well-inclined with you, even if they don't know exactly why at the time. These birthmarks need not be visible to gain the benefits of this Merit, though players that go to the trouble of representing them well with makeup may receive an additional Experience Trait at the Narrator's discretion.

Tranquil Soul (3-pt. Merit)

Your ancestors were a particularly calm and spiritual lot. As such, it's extraordinarily simple for you to fall into a trance-like meditative state. More importantly, meditation allows an advantage that others may not necessarily receive. A successful Meditation attempt (3 or more successes) combined with at least an hour's worth of meditation gives the user back a temporary Willpower point.

MET: By using the *Meditation* Ability to enter an uninterrupted trance state for at least half an hour, the Stargazer may regain a Willpower Trait. This benefit may only be gained once per session, and may not be used more times per story than the Stargazer has levels of *Meditation*.

Enraged Ancestor (4-pt. Flaw):

One of your ancestors was atypical for a Stargazer. Not only was he far afield from the path of moderation attempted by most of your tribe, but he embraced his wrathful anger and allowed his Rage to consume him all the more. As such, if a Rage roll reaches *three* successes (not four), you enter frenzy. Doing this too often can earn you shame from your tribe, along with potential damage to your Wisdom Renown.

MET: Once per story, typically at a very critical or dramatic moment, the Narrator may automatically rule that you immediately enter frenzy when sufficiently provoked — you receive no test to resist this frenzy, and cannot spend Willpower to subdue or direct it, though you also need not fear falling into the Thrall of the Wyrm either. If the circumstance is particularly appropriate to your *Enraged Ancestor*'s life or personality, this frenzy lasts for the remainder of the scene. The Narrator has final say over what circumstances trigger this heightened frenzy state, and you are encouraged to work with the Storyteller to develop a history and personality for your ignoble ancestor. Note that you need not possess the *Ancestors* Background to take this Flaw — indeed, you may have no idea why you get these strange feelings from time to time...

Totems

While other tribes may seek out and follow the Totems listed below, the Stargazers have long held special pacts with these particular spirits.

Totem of Respect
Suzaku the Red Bird

Background Cost: 5

Suzaku was one of the first birds who claimed allegiance with the Emerald Mother, and as such was able to take a place of prominence and leadership among all other birds. This avian empress is haughty and disdainful to those who aren't with her; but all who follow her as her children are accorded much favor. She teaches her children to be highborn and always strive to be the "better" individual. Suzaku has a rivalry with Falcon and his followers.

Traits: Packs chosen by Suzaku gain three dice to Leadership rolls. The avian empress also purifies the blood of her children slightly, distilling it down to a stronger bloodline. Each of her children may add one dot to their Pure Breed score (though this may not be above 5).

Ban: Suzaku demands that all pack members who follow her must spend all their efforts (in other words, at least one-third of their experience points) in improving their social skills (which may be Attributes, Abilities, or social Gifts; Storyteller's prerogative).

MET: Suzaku's children gain a free retest on all *Leadership* Challenges, and may increase their *Pure Breed* rating by one, provided they do not to exceed five levels of this Background in the process.

Totem of War
Bya-akko the White Tiger

Background Cost: 6

Bya-akko is a sleek and swift hunter, moving like a fast wind. But he is a saddened creature, for his own fleshly kin of albino tigers are largely gone from Gaia's flesh, and he alternates between periods of sadness and anger. He can be calm and wise one minute, but bloodthirsty and manic in the next. Bya-akko has identified the enemy who he believes destroyed his children — *the Weaver.*

Traits: Bya-akko grants each of his children one dot of Dexterity to help keep them quick and nimble. He also permits his packs three extra dice on any attack or defense roll involving specifically claws or teeth (no melee weapons). The White Tiger appreciates when his children rely on their own natural weapons in war.

Ban: Followers of the White Tiger must not own tools of the Weaver. Items with more than one moving part or electronic devices are the ones that earn Bya-akko's ire. Simple objects (klaives, clothing, crowbars, etc;) don't particularly anger him.

MET: Bya-akko grants his children a free *Nimble* Trait, and they are considered three Traits up on all attacking or defensive tests involving specifically clasws or teeth (no melee weapons). The Narrator may suspend this latter benefit if the players are constantly inventing fantastic situations and justifications simply to receive this benefit.

Totem of Wisdom
Seiryuu the Azure Dragon

Background Cost: 8

Seiryuu is an ancient sea dragon, as primordial and old as water itself, and is cousin to Uktena. He travels to the deepest dark of the eldest oceans and from there is able to plumb the depths for lost secrets and the answers to forgotten riddles.

Traits: Seiryuu allows his children to add their permanent Gnosis score to any roll involving Enigmas, thus allowing them to unravel the world's most puzzling secrets. He also grants them the ability to breathe underwater, for many elapsed truths can now only be found in the bottomless watery depths of the world.

Ban: Seiryuu asks that his children bathe twice a day.

MET: Seiryuu's children add their permanent Gnosis rating to their Traits on any *Enigmas* tests, and they may breathe underwater freely. They have no special immunity to the pressure or temperature of the depths, however.

Totem of Cunning

Genbu the Black Tortoise

Background Cost: 7

A wizened old tortoise, as black as obsidian, Genbu is a slow but powerful thinker. He is often mistaken for a Totem of Wisdom because of his reliance upon thought to solve problems, but he also enjoys using thought to outwit his enemies. He is a cunning enemy, ordinarily underestimated, and his elaborate schemes are often bizarre and unpredictable. The children of Genbu are much the same—seemingly sedentary beings waiting until the right moment to spring their long-designed trap.

Traits: Genbu grants each of his children a permanent point of Manipulation, even if this carries the Attribute over 5. He also grants his followers the power to appear harmless and unworthy of attack. Genbu gives his packs three dice for Stealth and Subterfuge rolls that can only be used when trying to avert attack or other danger.

Ban: The Black Tortoise asks that his children take pains to think before acting.

MET: Genbu's children receive a free *Beguiling* Trait, even if this takes them over their Trait maximum in this category. In addition, Genbu's packs receive a free retest on all *Stealth* and *Subterfuge* tests when trying to avert attack or other danger (not infiltrating the enemy stronghold or setting him up for a fall).

Fetishes

Stargazers fashion fetishes when absolutely necessary, but only when it serves to complement a Stargazer's own innate abilities — not replace them. Some examples of Stargazer fetishes (including three Ancestor Fetishes) are included below.

Lantern Riddle

Level One, Gnosis 7

If a Stargazer binds a Chimerling into a red Chinese lantern, she can create this fetish. When activated, the light of the lantern (which glows of its own accord) throws up a riddle lettered in shadows upon the wall. This riddle can be read by anybody, regardless of any language barrier that may exist. All who see the riddle must make Willpower rolls (difficulty 8) not to try to solve it. The riddle can be solved by a Wits + Enigmas roll (difficulty 8). During that time, those attempting to puzzle out the shadowy conundrum may not act, except to defend themselves. The power of this fetish lasts for an entire scene (or until the riddle is solved, whichever comes first).

Tiger Bells

Level Two, Gnosis 7

This fetish is a set of tiny bells, often square and gilded ornately, and are often worn around the wrists

of Stargazers on a leather cord. They were once used to calm wild animals by the court magicians of India and China. Now, they serve a similar though slightly different purpose. The Stargazer binds into the bells the spirit of a calming wind or soothing waters. Upon activation, the Stargazer may rattle the bells to calm and practically immobilize all spirits within a number of yards equal to her Gnosis. All spirits affected have their movement reduced by three-quarters and may not initiate attack on the Stargazer *or* on anything or anyone else. Spirits may defend, however, if attacked.

Phurba Dagger

Level Three, Gnosis 6

The *phurba* is a weapon common among both the Demon-Eater camp and the Trance-Runner camp, as this weapon originated in Tibet and was utilized predominantly by both groups. However, many of them exist outside of these camps and can be used by any Stargazer.

The dagger has a long handle and a short, flat blade. The handle is decorated with many angry and terrifying faces. The blade is often inscribed with prayers invoked against evil. It was meant as a weapon of exorcism, but also serves as an able dagger against any opponent. The weapon does the wielder's Strength in aggravated damage (as a fetish knife), except against demons. Against demons, the weapon does Strength + 3 aggravated damages. On an attack roll that gains three or more successes, the blade drains a single Willpower point from the target. To create a *phurba*, a Stargazer must bind into it a spirit of suffering or sorrow.

Ancestor Fetishes

Ancestor fetishes are above and beyond "simple" fetishes. These items are not hastily-created items, but items that once were held in the hands of the greatest of forebears; they are rare and wondrous treasures, the sort gained after great trials. One cannot simply pick up a fetish item and expect to use it, not even in its mundane state. Picking up an ancestor fetish to use it requires binding oneself to it, a feat that requires the expenditure of a permanent Gnosis point. Not doing so will cause the item to burn the wielder with an unsoakable level of aggravated damage. These fetishes are unique items. Binding oneself to any of them grants an additional two dice to Ancestors rolls

Gan Jiang, the Knotted Thunderbolt

Level Six, Gnosis 8

Gan Jiang was an ancient swordmaker of the Stargazers. His famous techniques of coaxing the spirits of his metal to obey him allowed him to fold the steel over and over again, creating a strong, sharp blade. He provided many of these weapons to his tribe, often creating fetish weapons for them to carry into battle. He had a way with the spirits, a natural ability to charm them, and entice them into his weapons.

One day, however, Gan Jiang's rapport with the spirits got the best of him. Gan Jiang had a metis son by another Stargazer, and one day a Jaggling of Chimera came and told Gan Jiang a disturbing prophecy: His metis son held great resentment toward his father for siring a disfigured beast, and this resentment was strong even in his current infancy. Gan Jiang didn't know that this Jaggling was really a spirit of Kung-Kung, and that the Great Corrupter sought to poison the swordmaker's mind. Gan Jiang went that night and murdered his own child, fearful that he had helped to sire a monster.

His tribe discovered his transgression and punished him with a curse. From then on, the metals wouldn't give into his manipulations, and any forge he used would barely even warm the metals, much less make them malleable for forming. So he retired to the countryside to live a life in Harano. Before he did, however, he created one last sword that didn't require use of the forge or of his metalsmith gifts. He called that sword after his own name, and left it in the hands of other Stargazers as recompense for his crime.

That sword is a *Tai-Ji* sword. The blade is made of bound-together imperial coins in a staggered pattern (somewhat like a thunderbolt). The grip is a simple wooden core wrapped in leather cording. It is a humble sword without even the slightest edge to it. Bound within it is an avatar of Chi-Rin, an Incarna similar to Unicorn.

When activated, the sword develops a sudden edge. It directs the hand of the wielder in sudden tugs and pushes, and allows the Stargazer to strike at the most vulnerable *chakra* points of the opponent. Every attack roll made with the activated weapon is at -1 difficulty; the damage is Strength + 5, aggravated. The activation of this weapon also confers one more benefit. When holding Gan Jiang, the Stargazer feels that her own *chakras* are vibrant and alive, and this helps protect her from damage. She gains +2 to every soak roll.

Fanruo Jushu, the Archer's Madness

Level Six, Gnosis 7

This ancestor fetish is actually an ancient bow and quiver set that predates recorded history. Few Stargazers have actually been able to discern any truth at all about this item, save that it's exceptionally old and the spirits don't wish to discuss it. Rumor has it that it is a legitimate relic from an old Stargazer myth. The myth goes like this: The Stargazer called Seven-Eclipses was called to court one day to be told that the sun was angry. It was twice as hot as usual, and seemed somehow furious. Seven-Eclipses went out, and felt the heat

and saw the sun as a gigantic orb in the sky. Before his very eyes, the orb separated, and suddenly there were *two* suns. This replication continued to occur until there were ten suns in the sky. Plants caught fire from the heat, men's hair singed down to the scalp, and regular earth was burned into black sand. But Seven-Eclipses would have none of this, so he brought out his bow and fired his magical arrows into each sun, extinguishing them one after the other. He destroyed nine of the ten suns, but the remaining original sun began to swell and grow again.

But then Seven-Eclipses saw it — a brief flash of black behind the fire of the sun, and he fired an arrow at the fleeting black spot. Coughed up out of the sun-flares was a cloud of black feathers, and a *jun-raven*, an evil Wyrm spirit, erupted from the womb of the sun. The raven's feathers turned to cooling rain and returned Gaia from her burning agony – but the jun-raven wasn't finished. It flew into Seven-Eclipses' magical bow and poisoned it. Seven-Eclipses went mad.

Legend suggests that this ancestral fetish was his bow. Upon activation, Fanruo Jushu's quiver fills with arrows and is never depleted. Any attack roll with the activated bow automatically has one success attributed to the roll (though this success can be removed with subsequent botches). Damage from one of the arrows is seven dice, aggravated.

The "archer's madness" comes in from the fact that, upon activation, the bow temporarily poisons the mind of the user (said to be the influence of the still-bound *jun-raven*). The Storyteller must pick a derangement, one that doesn't inhibit the attack, and for the remainder of the activation (one scene) the Stargazer suffers from the effects of this derangement.

The Yellow Veil of Karapatri

Level Six, Gnosis 7

The figure of Karapatri is something of a cautionary one among Stargazer legends. Karapatri (also called the Lady of the Endless Dark) was an apparent luminary of the Jade Emperor's own spiritual Ministers. Some say that her blood lineage actually includes the spirit matter of the Emperor's own mystic judges. Karapatri apparently grew so sad and so angry at the way the world had become, that she decided to do something about it. She decided first to tackle the corruption within her own tribe.

Those who Karapatri deemed "off the path" in some fashion or another received a visit from her. She never gauged one visitation the same as the next. One Stargazer may have committed so grave a crime as to have endangered a sacred caern, whereas another tribe member may have simply had too much to drink the night before. Karapatri would show up at night, and she would appear as a doppelganger of the punished. They would see themselves reflected back at them through her body, but the vision they saw of themselves would be laced with decay and rot, and their own sins could be read in Karapatri's mimicking eyes. Karapatri would achieve this effect using a gift from the Jade Emperor himself, which is this Yellow Veil.

It's said that the Yellow Veil is never found by a Stargazer, but that the Veil itself does the finding, seeking out a worthy soul who is capable of being the punishing angel that the tribe needs at any given moment. Others suggest that the Veil works its way into the hands of a Stargazer who unknowingly has Karapatri as his own ancestor. The truth remains unclear.

Activating this fetish causes its wearer to be seen by the viewer as being a distorted mirror image of the viewer herself. Being confronted by one's own corrupted twin has several effects. First is a terrible feeling of depression and self-loathing, which results in the removal of two temporary Willpower points. (In the case of Garou, this is also mirrored by a removal of two temporary Rage points on top of the Willpower loss.) Also, the viewer must answer all of the Veil-wearer's questions, and she must answer them truthfully (though "truth" is relative to the teller). It's important to remember that the viewer falls into a dreamlike trance and not herself when under the effects of his fetish. When the Veil-wearer is gone (or has deactivated the Veil's effects), the target is left with an unbearable desire to "do right," though again that urge is somewhat relative to the individual. Any rolls the target makes over the following lunar cycle toward the act of "doing right" are done with an extra die.

Talens

Emperor's Tea

Gnosis 6

To create these tea leaves, a jade-spirit must be bound into them. They are black and deeply aromatic. They may be brewed into a tea and consumed accordingly, but they may also be chewed for their effects. Consuming the tea in either manner sharpens the senses of the Garou temporarily. For the next hour, the Stargazer may add a single die to any rolls involving Perception.

Star Dust

Gnosis 7

This talen eases a Stargazer's passage into the Umbra. This white, glowing dust must be spread in a circle on the ground. When the Stargazer steps into that circle and attempt to Step Sideways, she'll find that the Gauntlet has been reduced by one, thus lowering the difficulty accordingly. To create Star

Dust, one must bind a spirit of night or the heavens into bone dust or grave earth.

The Jade Sentai

A *sentai* is a hengeyokai war party. It's similar to a Garou pack, but often they are thrown together out of necessity; rarely do they come together through choice. Many Stargazers of the East, as members of the Beast Courts, become part of *sentai* out of the needs and wishes of the Courts themselves. They fight alongside other Fera in an effort to free the Middle Kingdom from the depredations of the Wyrm.

Recently, however, a strange phenomenon has occurred. Once, as spoken of in Stargazer legend, the Jade Emperor chose a small number of Stargazers to serve as his eyes and hands in the world. These Stargazers, haphazardly thrown together without pre-existing knowledge of one another, formed the *Jade Sentai*. For many hundreds of years after, many *Jade Sentai* parties came and went. Some died in battle, some fell to old age, and others still went mad with their missions. But then, suddenly, the voice of the Jade Emperor was gone. He no longer chose Stargazers for the *Jade Sentai*, and in fact one did not exist at all. The world for the last thousand years has been without a group such as this. But recently, after the fall of Shigalu and with the return of the Stargazers to their homelands, it happened again. A *Jade Sentai* was created.

Choosing the Jade Sentai

Unlike the Silver Pack of the Garou Nation, the Jade Sentai is not chosen by other shapechangers. There are no contests of will, no games of glory, wisdom, or honor. There is no competition at all, because those of this group are *called*. It is not the voice of the Jade Emperor that calls them, as once it was, but now it is the voice of his Ministers. A Stargazer hears a voice in their dreams, a great booming thunderous song that calls them to the Songgao Mountain in China. There, the disparate Stargazers (who may be chosen from all over the world) come together and wait for further instructions. Those who resist the call gain a Derangement as they go mad from denying the cosmic force that beckons to them.

Three to five Stargazers (and alone must they be Stargazers; no other tribe members or Fera are called) comprise the Jade Sentai. Their auspice and Rank doesn't matter, only that they are Stargazer Garou. Once chosen, and once they go to meet at the summit of Songgao Mountain, their previous pack and totem ties are severed in a blast of white light, and they are granted (though some might say "leashed to") the status of Jade Sentai members.

The Mission

The goals and missions of the Jade Sentai remain unclear. Clearly, they're serving a higher power, for the words of the Ministers resonate with much power. The instructions that they follow are usually in service to Gaia, and may involve rescuing a fallen caern, seeking out an ancient spirit, or speaking at a Garou concolation. Sometimes, however, the instructions are inscrutable and strange, and may ask extreme tasks of the group. They may be directed to murder a seemingly Wyrm-clean business man. But why? No explanations are offered, only the understated understanding that this must be done to assure balance is kept in the cosmos. Will the young businessman go on to found some horrendous company that will chew apart Gaia's resources? Or will he become the flesh-vessel for an ancient escaping bane? No truth is given in this regard, only that the action must be taken for Gaia to remain safe.

The Jade Sentai can refuse – or fail – the tasks laid out by the Ministers of the Jade Emperor. Doing so, however, damages their Renown (-3 Honor, -3 Wisdom) and may invoke a Derangement (Storyteller's Prerogative).

Leaving the Jade Sentai

One may not choose to leave the Jade Sentai. Dying, of course, is one of the ways to leave the group. Being a member of the Jade Sentai is a perilous life, one that doesn't allow rest and puts all in a state of constant risk. However, if one member dies, the rest of the Sentai is automatically disbanded. There are no more commands from the Ministers, and all the benefits of being one of the sentai disappear. At that time, another group will be chosen to serve the Jade Emperor and his Ministers.

And that is predominantly the other way to leave the group, is when the Ministers simply see fit to dismiss the sentai. No logic or reason is given behind such a decision; the group members only know that suddenly, they're no longer part of the legendary party. They may resume lives of their own will, and in fact do whatever they choose, for they are no longer bound. Many who are discarded as such either move into a life of quiet meditation (joining the ranks of the Tranquil Stargazers) or actually fall into Harano, being so rejected.

The whims of the Ministers aren't clear. Some *Jade Sentai* groups will be allowed to exist as members until they are old and withered, whereas others may serve for a year and be "released" once whatever unfathomable purpose has been fulfilled.

Jade Sentai Totem:

Feng-Huang, Emperor of Birds

Background Cost: None. This totem may be taken only by members of the Jade Sentai.

Feng-Huang is one of the original celestial creatures who helped the Jade Emperor and T'ai-Shen create the world. Feng-Huang is actually similar to the Phoenix, in the fact that it is an immortal bird. But there are a few key differences. First is that Feng-Huang, while having the general appearance of a fiery Phoenix, does not go through the cycles of death and resurrection. Feng-Huang is a truly immortal creature with an unbroken cycle of life. Also, Feng-Huang is actually *two* birds married into one body. It is a male phoenix (*Feng*) and a female phoenix (*Huang*) married together in one body with two heads. Feng-Huang is a wise, though somewhat alien entity, speaking in vast riddles and puzzles to its children. It accepts whatever Jade Sentai that the Ministers choose.

Traits: Jade Sentai members with the Feng-Huang totem gain 3 temporary Renown in each category (Honor, Wisdom, Glory). Each Jade Sentai member also gains an additional die in all rolls involving interaction with spirits *and* an additional die on all Gnosis rolls. Children of Feng-Huang also receive -1 difficulty on attacks performed against Wyrm creatures.

Ban: The members of the Jade Sentai mustn't refuse the commands given by the Ministers. If they do, they lose Renown (3 Honor, 3 Wisdom) for the first transgression, and the second transgression gives them a Derangement atop the Renown loss. The third transgression opposing the Ministers' tasks causes the Jade Sentai to disband. All of the benefits of Feng-Huang disappear.

Roleplaying a Stargazer

The Stargazers are *almost* a forgotten tribe. Their numbers were low to begin with, and their population continues to thin itself out. They have up and left the world of the West to return to their homelands, but even that has been a bitter return. Some of their werewolf brethren hate them for their choice, others long for their return, and some outright have dismissed them as a casualty of war. But the Stargazers don't want to be dismissed so readily. After sitting back and healing their bruises, now they seek to return — if not to the Garou Nation properly, at least to their prior strength.

It is a great time to step into the shoes of these tragic Garou, as there is such a high level of *potential* waiting in the wings with each and every member of the Stargazer tribe. They're a complicated group, with ranks broken and direction lost. Playing one is no small challenge. Here are a few things to remember should you make your next character (or your current one) a Stargazer Garou:

Stereotypes need not apply. It's easy to fall into a trap with the Stargazers. It's sometimes too easy to mistake this tribe as a bunch of martial-artist, Tao-focused, sagely monastic Garou, but that is drastically far from the truth. There are those that fit a bill similar to that description, true. But the majority of the tribe is nothing like that. While the overarching theme of the tribe is one thing, the group is comprised of *individuals*, and each individual can be wildly different from one another, and wildly different from any stereotype conjured up. Stargazers can, ultimately, be anything you need them to be, provided they fit somehow into the scheme of the tribe. Stargazers can be blood-and-thunder warlords from India, spiritual scientists from Chicago, mad lupus wolf cubs from Tibet, or a revolutionary freedom-fighter from Cambodia. They don't need to know martial arts, don't necessarily need dots in Meditation (or if they do, maybe they don't *enjoy* meditation), and they needn't be Asian, either. The Stargazer tribe is predominantly Asian, simply because that's the geographical location from whence they were born. But they've had a long time now away from the homelands of the East. Their tribal heritage is based on breeding, and in that time away from home, they bred with people of all races, creeds, and lifestyles. A Stargazer Garou can literally come from *anybody*.

And they are *flawed* heroes. In the same vein as stereotypes, it's easy to think of the Stargazer character as the wise, elder Garou. These Garou seem flawless in their sagely advice, holding the keys to the cosmos that they will only parcel out to a lucky few. Again, it's not like that. Sure, there are Stargazers who think of themselves as such. Are they right? Hardly. There may be truths contained within, but their own shrewd acumen is largely in their own minds. And the rest of the tribe are werewolves who definitely don't have the answers to the universe's most boggling problems. They're probably aware of the questions, perhaps painfully so, and they're likely in pursuit of such answers. But they are not flawless, and in fact they're quite flawed. Stargazers have faults and make mistakes like anybody else. They can be prideful, they can be vain, they can be damagingly self-conscious, and they can be hateful toward themselves or others. They can have addictions, phobias, disfigurements. But they strive past their faults. They seek to elevate themselves above their own limitations. And that's what makes them heroes.

Stargazers are still werewolves. Stargazers make a big deal about their Rage. Some seek to moderate it, some hope to vanquish it, and fewer still hope to embrace it. Ultimately, one of the tribal themes is that the Stargazers aim to master the fury within. But always remember that, no matter what, a Stargazer is always a werewolf. Inside is a core of righteous anger that grows out of the pain and suffering of Gaia. It manifests itself a little at every moment, showing a small part of itself in the form of teeth, claws, bestial eyes, and sinewy muscle sprouting rough lupine hair. Werewolves are beasts, monsters driven to their own brand of savagery and primal war-making. The Stargazers may hope to tamp that down; and in some ways, they're at least more successful at it than other tribes have been. But it's still there. Their Rage, their very *natures* can be suppressed, but they can't be destroyed.

Stargazers are a desperate lot. And why wouldn't they be? The Apocalypse is ringing the doorbell. The Emerald Mother screams in pain with every twist of the knife in the Wyrm and Weaver's hands. And the Stargazers have had one upheaval after the other. They lost one of the biggest caerns and with it, many of their greatest heroes. Then it seemed an all-out war against them as the Wyrm took some of their other supplemental caerns. And now many of them have up and dropped whatever they were doing in the West to resume a new life and new outlook in the East. But even there, the Beast Courts are slow to fully accept them. Their lives are complicated, confusing, and strange. It lends itself to desperation. On the outside, the Stargazers may be a calm veneer of spiritual self-mastery, but for the most part, it has to be a show. On the inside they're a raging tumult, desperate because it feels like the tribe – and perhaps all of the world — has entered its last few days. Like an older person who doesn't want to die but knows it's coming soon. But, as the poem says, this tribe will not go quietly into that good night. They will rage against the dying of the light.

Chapter Four: Champions of Suffering Virtue

He sits with kings and heroes who are passed
Into the everlasting, happy home,
Where no wars are, nor wounds, and good men dwell.
— *The Mahabharata*

The Stargazer tribe clings tenaciously to life. Its ranks have grown thinner than ever. And in a time that requires unity, they are also perhaps more distant from one another than they have ever been before. Some have grown disillusioned, others have succumbed to the dark succor of Harano. Many attempt to walk a firm line, holding steady to tribal ideals, whereas the rest have thrown caution to the wind and learned to embrace the Zen chaos that the world offers.

What follows are five ready-to-play Stargazer templates that can be used by both players and Storytellers — as characters or simply as examples. Beyond that, there are also several Stargazers — some still-living, others long-dead — worthy of note that can be taken either as allies in this current age, or as Ancestors from the long-gone past.

Pop Culture Princess

Quote: *You like my new t-shirt? Bart Simpson makes me laugh! Eh, you don't care. I'm done with you.*

Prelude: As a young girl of Ushiku City, 50 miles outside of Tokyo, you had an extreme fascination with all things pop culture. You loved the goofy sounds of J-Pop, manga, and *anything* American. When you were twelve you got together with three of your friends and started your *own* pop group, the Queens of Junk, and suddenly a producer from Tokyo was interested in purchasing your first single! It wasn't long before "Mr. America" was on a handful of Japan's Top 40 stations.

But not long after you moved to Tokyo, away from your parents and into your own apartment (at the age of 14), you began having dreams. Strange dreams where the gigantic Buddha statue of your hometown began speaking to you. He told you that soon you would change, and with that would come a whole new life. The dreams didn't feel good; they felt instead like nightmares. But the Buddha was right. Something was happening. Something within you was changing.

One night a cluster of teenagers began hassling you in Shinjuku Station, telling you that you had to come with them, that they would take you to the local Beast Court (whatever that was) to begin your teaching. They weren't human, they said, and then they told you that *neither were you*. You didn't want to hear them, didn't want to believe that you were some monster and you'd have to leave your wonderful life. Feeling cornered with a need to escape, you ran into the Takashimaya department store to hide and cry. And there you changed. And you knew those boys were right.

Since then, you listened and went along. It took awhile to get used to things, but now you're a productive member of the Shomben Yokocho ("Piss Alley") sentai in Tokyo. You run with a pack of boys, and it didn't take long to model yourself as their leader whether they like it or not. Some of the old-hats and big-wigs of the court treat you like you're still a little kid (so what if you're only 15?), but they don't know how cool you really are, do they? While they sit off, meditating and humming and doing nothing, you and your merry war-makers wreak havoc against the corrupted businessmen and criminals of the city as your old life floats farther and farther away.

Concept: You've found new enlightenment through a sort of "Pop Culture Dharma." You find the teachings of truth and wisdom in Top 40 songs, TV shows from 1950's America, and Japanese anime. The Weaver is not your enemy; no, the Queen Spider of Reality is enough of a friend to keep you entertained at all hours, and if there's one thing that you always need, it's entertainment.

Roleplaying Hints: You're extremely sad at the loss of your life and burgeoning pop-idol career, but you overcompensate with over-eagerness, annoying happiness, and devout curiosity. You refuse to let anyone know that you're sad, because you're the princess, the heroine, the trickster priestess who is the power behind the throne. Anybody who doesn't listen to you and worship the ground you walk upon, well, they can just kiss off, can't they?

Equipment: Stack of *manga*, trendy street costumes, trunk of cosplay costumes, *wakazashi*

STARGAZERS™

Name: | Breed: Homid | Pack Name:
Player: | Auspice: Ragabash | Pack Totem:
Chronicle: | Camp: | Concept: Pop Culture Princess

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●○○○	Charisma	●●●●○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●●○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●○○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●●○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	●○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	●●○○○
Brawl	●○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Dodge	●●●○○	Etiquette	●●○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Leadership	●●○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	●●●○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Performance	●●●●○	Politics	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Rituals	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Ancestors	●●●○○	Persuasion	
Contacts	●●○○○	Blur of the Milky Eye	
	○○○○○	Paper Butterfly	
	○○○○○	Balance	
	○○○○○		

Renown: Glory ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □; Honor ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □; Wisdom ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Rank 1

Rage ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Gnosis ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower ● ● ● ● ● ● □ □ □ □ □

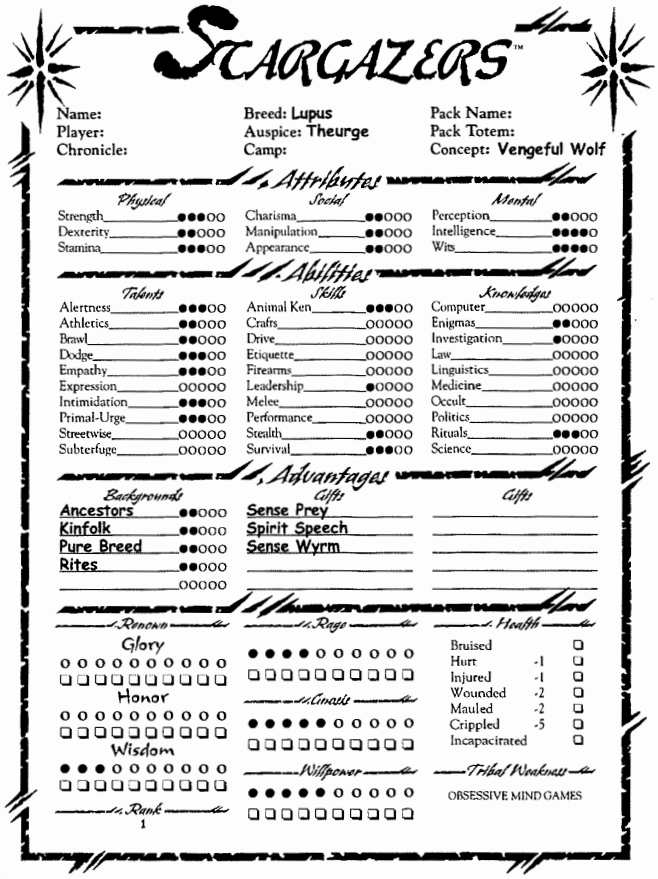
Vengeful Wolf

Quote: *Look at the little spiders dancing across their web. Venomous spirits, pfah! I'm hungry. Let's eat.*

Prelude: You were born in the Shanghai Zoo, where they took you from your parents and forced you to be alone. Men smelling of grease and processed food bottle-fed you. They gave you injections of something to make you docile. And then the people came. Behind scuffed-up plastic "glass" they watched you. Children pointed and laughed. Parents stared balefully upon you.

Years went by like this. You ate old meat. Your fur was run with patches of mange. Your instincts sang out and called for a different place and a better time and you had dreams of running through forests and mountain passes. But every morning when you awoke, you were still in a cage, and you grew sad and angry.

But then they came. Others, like you — wolves. But they helped you escape into the city. They took you outside and taught you the ways of mitigating your fury until it could be used, like tooth and claw, to bring down the beasts that punished you for much of your young life. Your new pack gave your one-time jailer a name: *The Weaver*. Seeking vengeance, they took you back into the cradle of the world you hate, the domain of that cruel Queen Spider. They lead you back into the heart of the city.



STARGAZERS™

Name: | Breed: Lupus | Pack Name:
Player: | Auspice: Theurge | Pack Totem:
Chronicle: | Camp: | Concept: Vengeful Wolf

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●○○	Charisma	●●○○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●●●○
Stamina	●●●○○	Appearance	●●○○○	Wits	●●●●○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●●○○	Animal Ken	●●●○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	●●○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	●●○○○
Brawl	●●○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Investigation	●○○○○
Dodge	●●●○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	●●●○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Leadership	●○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●●○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	●●●○○	Performance	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●●○○○	Rituals	●●●○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	●●●○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Ancestors	●●○○○	Sense Prey	
Kinfolk	●●○○○	Spirit Speech	
Pure Breed	●●○○○	Sense Wyrm	
Rites	●●○○○		
	○○○○○		

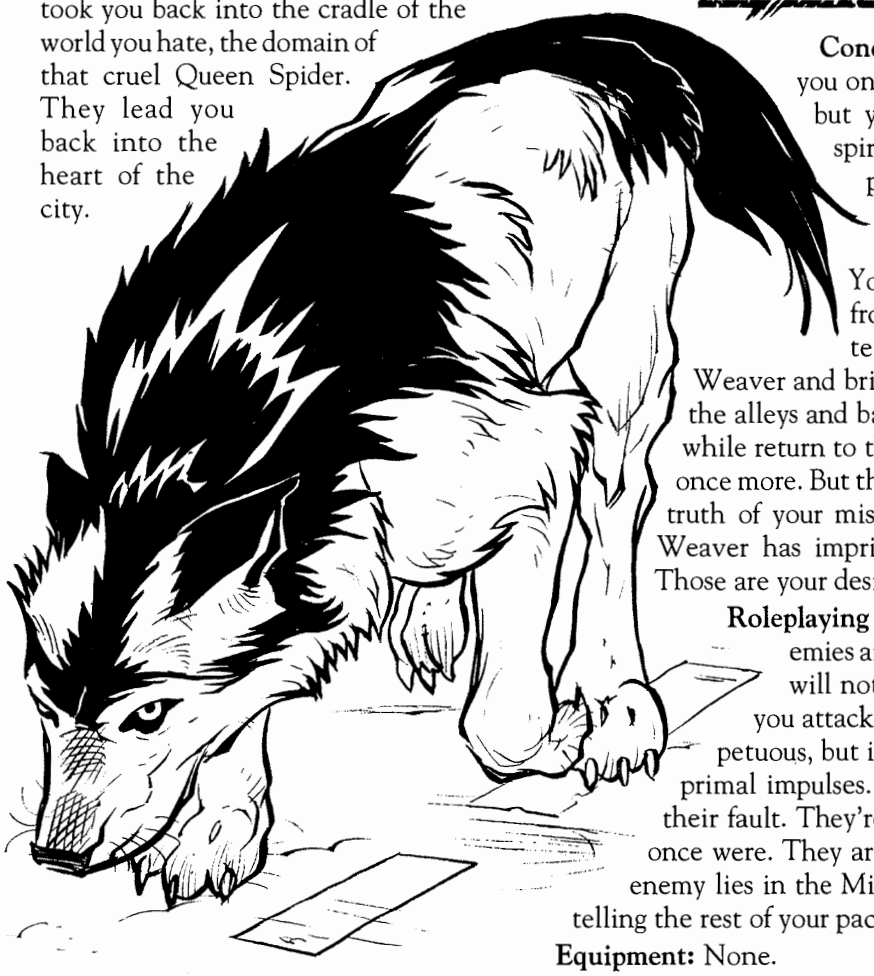
Renown
Glory ○○○○○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○
Honor ○○○○○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○
Wisdom ●●●○○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○
Rank 1

Rage ●●●●○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○
Gnosis ●●●●●○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○
Willpower ●●●●●○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness
OBSESSIVE MIND GAMES



Concept: Gaia is being held prisoner, just as you once were. The Emerald Mother suffers, but you can help. You can speak to the spirits. You have an unforeseen ease slipping in and out of the spirit world and can communicate with the small gods of the forest *and* of the city effortlessly. You use these skills to turn spirits away from the harsh terrors of the city. You teach them how to rebel against the Weaver and bring it down from the inside. You hunt the alleys and back streets of Shanghai, and once in a while return to the forest to find peace and tranquility once more. But then you return to the city, knowing the truth of your mission. The Weaver shall pay, for the Weaver has imprisoned us all. Freedom and balance. Those are your desires.

Roleplaying Hints: You make many allies and enemies among the spirits of the city. Those who will not help you are meant to hurt you, and you attack them accordingly. You are angry, impetuous, but in desperate search of controlling your primal impulses. You aren't angry at humans; it's not their fault. They're shackled to the Weaver, just as you once were. They aren't the casualties you seek; your true enemy lies in the Mirror Lands, and you have no problem telling the rest of your pack that.

Equipment: None.

Artist

Quote: *Do you like it? You don't understand it, do you? Sit there. Look at it for as long as you can manage, and then look at it some more. You'll see the truth in my work.*

Prelude: You were a child of imbalance, born of a coupling that went outside of the natural way. You are the result of inequity and dishonor. For all that, you weren't treated poorly; in fact, you were hardly treated at all. The other sept members ignored you, and your impetuous parents (whoever they might've been) left right after you came struggling out of the womb. It seemed as if nobody knew what quite to make of you, or what to do with you. And so, for much of your youth you were left to your own devices. You occupied yourself by reproducing the world around you through drawing. You scrawled on rocks, carved temporary pictures in the dirt, even smudged your own skin with coal. Other Stargazers taught when you needed teaching, shepherded peacefully through your First Change, but ultimately? You were disregarded.

That is, until an outcast elder came back to the sept and immediately took you under his tutelage. Sensing a kindred spirit, he took it upon himself to guide you.

STARGAZERS™

Name:	Breed: **Metis**	Pack Name:
Player:	Auspice: **Philodox**	Pack Totem:
Chronicle:	Camp:	Concept: **Artist**

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●●○○
Dexterity	●●○○○	Manipulation	●●●●○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●●○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●●●●○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●●○○○	Animal Ken	●○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	●○○○○	Enigmas	●●●○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Investigation	●●●○○
Dodge	●○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	●●●○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●○○○
Expression	●●●○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Medicine	●●○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	●○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Performance	●○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Rituals	●●○○○
Subterfuge	●●○○○	Survival	●○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Ancestors	●●●○○	Create Element	
Rites	●●○○○	Resist Pain	
	○○○○○	Channeling	
	○○○○○	Truth of Gaia	
	○○○○○		

Renown: ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Rage: ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Gnosis: ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Willpower: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Health		
Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness: OBSESSIVE MIND GAMES

He prepared you with hours of harsh meditation, and scolded you for your lineage regardless of how much say you had in the situation. You were often denied food, or sleep, or were made to stand for an entire day on one leg. Soon, your skills as an artist began to take shape and merge together with your newfound understanding (some might say obsession) with balance. And the other sept members began paying attention.

Concept: You are an artist who uses his work to express lessons in balance. You use black and white only. There is always a careful balance between the two contrasts in each of your pieces, but every work is different. Your art isn't merely for the sake of beauty, or simply to channel your creative desires. Your desires don't matter; but what you can say with your art does. It is a teaching tool, an item meant to show others the proper way. Because of it, you've been allowed some small access to tribal society. Now you can show them all the error behind their ways.

Roleplaying Notes: Excepting a rare few, the other members of your sept just don't get it. You were a deformed whelp birthed from a cursed union, but this has allowed you access to many secret truths, as shown to you by your mentor. Treat others with righteous (though calm) disdain. Speak little; allow your work to do the talking. You savor the chance to show others the truth.

Equipment: Charcoals, pens, ink, sketchbook.

Satori Seeker

Quote: *Ha! Did you feel that? Try it. Bite your tongue, taste the blood, scream the mantra loudly! It's wonderful!*

Prelude: You didn't have many friends in London. You were a Pakistani, a *Paki*, so you were left alone a lot. And after awhile, that was mostly okay. You learned to appreciate small things. The smells of the city, the distant songs on a faraway radio, the dirt on your hands. But there was a yearning within that continually unsettled you. There was a connection you were missing. You wanted to share these wonderful details of life with everybody else, but sadly, nobody would listen.

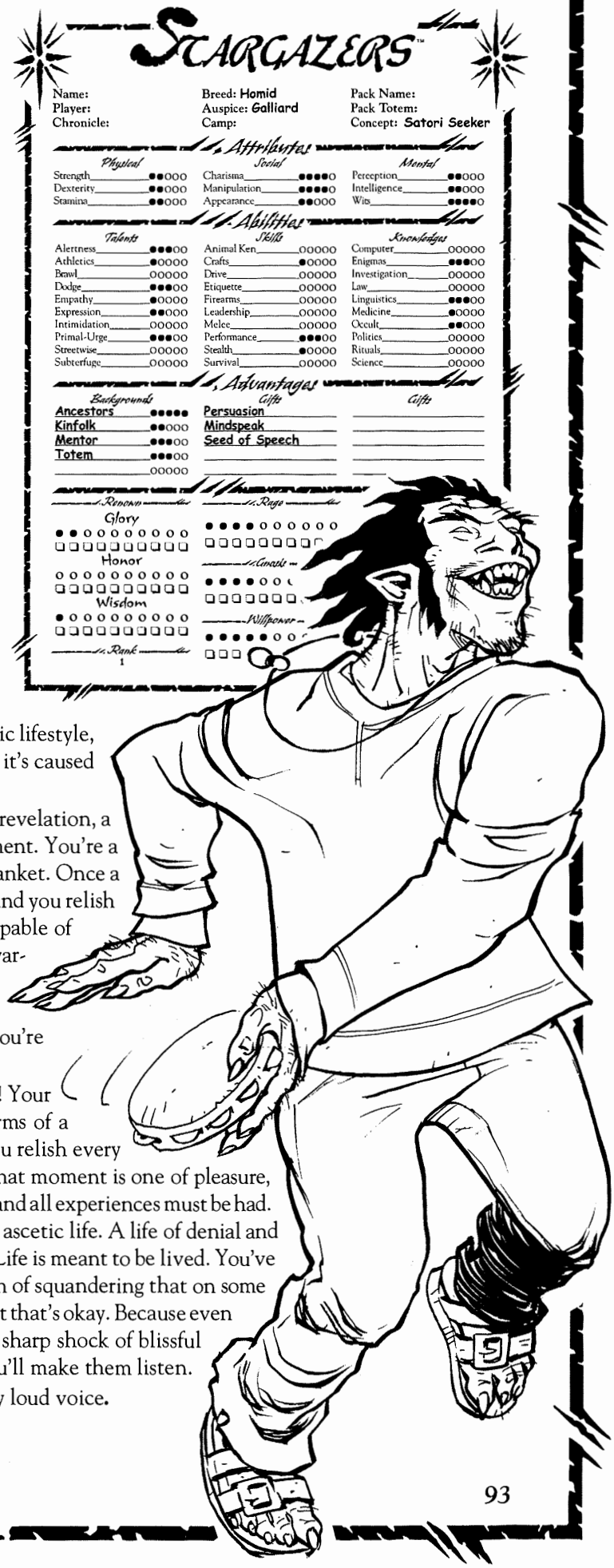
And then came the First Change, and this Korean man showed up at your door, and next thing you knew you were whisked away to a whole other life away from London, away from loneliness, away from persecution. For the first time, you felt truly alive.

He has taken to teaching you the mantras of the cosmos. These spoken words and songs touch a spot in the deep chambers of your heart. It feels like you're connecting with something way stronger and way more powerful than your puny, insignificant self. You and your teacher travel from caern to caern in the West and the East, spreading the secret truths of the immortal songs and the powerful words. He's also taken to teaching you the path of moderation, leading you into an ascetic lifestyle, but so far, you haven't had any of that nonsense. So far, it's caused you quite a bit of trouble.

Concept: Satori is the concept of a brief moment of revelation, a swift kick that jostles one into a temporarily enlightenment. You're a Garou that clings to the concept of satori like a safety blanket. Once a lonely character, you've now taken hold of this new life and you relish it with every ounce of your being. You are a Galliard capable of rendering others speechless with your weird songs and warbling howls. You don't know much about other Stargazers, because you've seen only a handful, but you've met countless other Garou, and all of them seem to think you're some kind of weirdo.

Roleplaying Hints: Being a Garou is a blessed thing! Your senses are heightened, and your howls can take the forms of a thousand maddening prayers! You relish in your life. You relish every moment that you're capable of giving yourself, even if that moment is one of pleasure, pain, doubt, or joy. All emotions need to be experienced, and all experiences must be had. Your mentor doesn't understand this. He talks of a hard, ascetic life. A life of denial and suppression of the Self. But you're not too clear on that. Life is meant to be lived. You've been given a gift, and you haven't the slightest intention of squandering that on some cramped, repressed philosophy. Sure, he punishes you. But that's okay. Because even punishment is capable of delivering you into the short, sharp shock of blissful satori. And now you're able to show others the way. You'll make them listen.

Equipment: Red robe, pan flute, tambourine, a very loud voice.



The Unexpected

Quote: *Yeah, I know, I need balance, discipline, whatever. I have all that. Can't you just leave me alone for a little while?*

Prelude: You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. Your family consisted of wealthy white Chicago suburbanites. Your father was a politician, your mother a stage actress, and your younger sister a promising pianist. You knew you'd never have to really work for a living. The choice was yours, any path was open to you. Or so you thought.

Your sister was raped. And you knew the bastard who did it. He was a local rich kid like yourself, went to school with your sister in the tenth grade. One afternoon, out behind the basketball courts at the private school, he raped your sister. Two nights later, you went after him. You didn't know why, or what you were going to do. But the answers fell quickly into place. A dark heart of anger rose fast like a storm inside, and you felt yourself *changing*. Before you knew what was happening, you had become a massive beast, and you could smell the fear oozing from his pores like dirty sweat. And you killed him. Rent him to pieces while he was still dressed in his school uniform.

That night, as you wandered aimlessly down the street, blood still glistening on your (once again human) hands, they found you. And took you away from your family, your friends, and your comfortable destiny. They have taught you what you are, and they have told you that whether you like it or not, they are your pack, and they are just like you. Your new pack – a group of men calling themselves *ksatriyas* — has taught you to feel great remorse for the killing you did. While you are Death Incarnate, they say, you are not to relish your role, and aren't to go accepting it with Rage in your heart. Someday, they say, you will understand. Right now, you feel terribly sad, and very confused.

Concept: You are Ahroun, but you don't understand what that means. You are a Stargazer, but you aren't like any others that you've seen. You have a natural charisma and leadership open and available to you, but you're too afraid to touch it. You're afraid that the anger will return, and that you'll be out of control like you were that first night. Also, because of both your race and your exorbitantly Western upbringing, you're viewed with both distant curiosity and up-front disdain from your pack mates and other Stargazer Garou.

Roleplaying Hints: Act with reluctance, as if every action could lead you to potential damnation. And yet, despite this reluctance, you're angry. Angry at the pack for stealing you away from your privileged life, angry that your sister was so violated (and will probably never fulfill her musical dreams), and angry at the world for being such a broken, fucked-up place. You want to accept the peace and balance that your pack has offered you, and you've even begin to learn some of the mantras that they're teaching you. But this isn't your life. Not yet. Maybe someday, but for now, it's all too overwhelming.

Equipment: Set of expensive clothes, keys to an Audi you don't have anymore, penknife.

STARGAZERS™

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: **Homid**
Auspice: **Ahroun**
Camp:

Pack Name:
Pack Totem:
Concept: **The Unexpected**

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●○	Charisma	●●●○○	Perception	●●○○○
Dexterity	●●●○○	Manipulation	●●○○○	Intelligence	●●○○○
Stamina	●●●○○	Appearance	●●●○○	Wits	●●○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	●○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Computer	●●●○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	●○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	●●○○○	Drive	●●●○○	Investigation	●●○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Etiquette	●●●○○	Law	●●○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	●●●○○
Expression	○○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	●●○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Politics	●●○○○
Streetwise	●○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Rituals	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	●○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
Allies	●●●●●	Smell of Man	
Ancestors	●●○○○	Razor Claws	
Contacts	●●●○○	Imbalance	
Kinfolk	●●●○○	Falling Touch	
	○○○○○		

Renown
Glory ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Honor ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Wisdom ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Rank

Rage ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Gnosis ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Willpower ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

Health

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

Tribal Weakness
OBSESSIVE MIND GAMES

Notable Stargazers

Stargazers are extraordinarily close to their ancestors, and as such tend to distinguish less between the living Stargazers and the Stargazers who have passed. In some fashion, the dead live on somewhere, somehow, existing as a presence in the soul of another tribe member or kinfolk. "Dead" and "alive" mean less, for any Stargazer, whether they were killed in battle a thousand years ago or still are active in Tokyo as a teacher of Zen swordsmanship, is still active in the protection of the Emerald Mother. What follows are some of these Stargazers, living and dead, famous and infamous.

The First Jade Sentai

Jin Jia, "The Gentleman in Golden Armor"

The Ahroun Jin Jia left his tribe not long after his First Change, and went to live among the humans. He forsook tribe, pack, and service to the Emerald Mother for a life in the aristocracy of men. Reaction to him was mixed; the humans always smelled something on him, something bestial, something alien. But he tempered his Rage and some were actually taken in by his "roguish" demeanor. Whenever able, he indulged in gambling, wine, and song, and was a "gentleman caller" to many women. Nightly he dreamt of the error of his ways, and saw the spirits and his few ancestors chiding and mocking him for turning away from his duty, but he ignored them and engaged in further debaucheries.

It wasn't long before the time when one of his many female conquests stood out among all the others, and Jin Jia believed he was in love. He had bedded a daughter of the Dowager Empress merely for the challenge, but soon believed that he couldn't live his life without her. He told her as such, and it wasn't long before the two of them began seeing each other exclusively in secret rooms in the palace of the Empress, keeping their affair a secret. In a year's time, the girl became pregnant, and gave birth to a daughter, Lirong. Jin Jia was happy, and he knew that all his dreams at night seeking to punish him for his decision were meaningless and he had made the proper choice. He took his love away from the palace, and they settled in a small fishing village.

But in truth, he hadn't. His skills as a werewolf were dampened, so much so that he was unable to see the reality of the situation until it was far too late. He came to his home one night to find a grisly scene — his true love had exsanguinated and murdered their child. The blood was all upon the walls, scrawled in grim prayers and epithets to the dark one, Kung-Kung. His true love was a monster, tainted in servitude to the mad one, and she had escaped.

Jin Jia entered a period of inescapable depression, and Harano drove him to kill himself. But his hand was stayed, just as he prepared to thrust a dagger into his own belly. The voice of the Jade Emperor called to him, and commanded him to turn away from his broken life and enter the Emperor's service. Realizing that this was a second chance, Jin Jia accepted the offer.

He served the Jade Emperor well up until he was an old man, battling the corruptions of Gong-Gong along with the other two members of the Jade Sentai. He was known for wearing a set of radiant golden armor that mystically molded to his skin regardless of what form he took. Jin Jia never managed to find his one-time-love and murderer of his daughter.

Kui-Xing, "The Minister of Stars"

The stars held many secrets — secrets that Kui-Xing the Theurge sought to discover. He was young, but his eager need for knowledge made him a powerful scholar among the Stargazer tribe. He was brilliant on matters both earthly and otherworldly, and he could draw out the answers to nearly any riddle, like sucking poison from a wound. The Heavens above were not just a jumble of white lights on a black velvet background, but instead served as a map to truth and tranquility.

But Kui-Xing was abominably ugly. He was born metis, and his skin was nothing more than blotchy folds of fat flesh that gave him a physically repulsive appearance. Kui-Xing appeared as a strange breed between Garou and amphibian, and his pride suffered for it, regardless of his brilliance. He was afforded respect from the sept of Stargazers he belonged to, and there he lived a quiet, contemplative life, aiding the more active Garou in their quests.

At the time, there was a ruling body of hengeyokai that lorded over much of the Middle Kingdom. This council of elders was called the Ministry of Thunder, and they had been challenged by a trickster spirit called Fu Lan, the Entangling Woman. Fu Lan had given them a simple riddle, and told them that if the Ministry could not solve it, then their authority was void. Unable to solve this most basic of conundrums, the elders called to all the Middle Kingdom — he who could help them unravel this mystery would be afforded much respect and wisdom. At the urgings of his sept, Kui-Xing answered the call and went to see the Ministry of Thunder cloaked in a heavy cowled robe that concealed his horrible form.

The riddle *was* easy: "Who becomes pregnant without conceiving, who becomes fat without eating?" Kui-Xing didn't even have to consult skyward, for in the sky was already the answer — *clouds*. He told them the answer, and Fu Lan appeared, hissing and spitting in anger, for that solution was correct. The Ministry

applauded Kui-Xing's efforts, but demanded that he lower the hood of his cloak out of consideration.

He did so, and was greeted with howls of disgust and laughter. The Ministry mocked him openly and sent him packing with none of the pride he had sought. Feeling worthless, deep in the pits of Harano, Kui-Xing found the highest cliff-face, and tossed himself off into the white-capped ocean below.

His time was not up, however, and Kui-Xing was saved. Only moments after striking the water, a great dark form rose beneath him, catching him and carrying him back to the surface. He was astounded to see that he was resting upon the back of a massive black tortoise called Genbu. Genbu spoke with the authority of the Jade Emperor and his Ministers — Kui-Xing had been chosen by the highest of high to become part of the first Jade Sentai. Seeing no other way to go (and unwilling to deny the authority of the Bureaucracy of Heaven), he agreed and went to Songgao Mountain to meet the others.

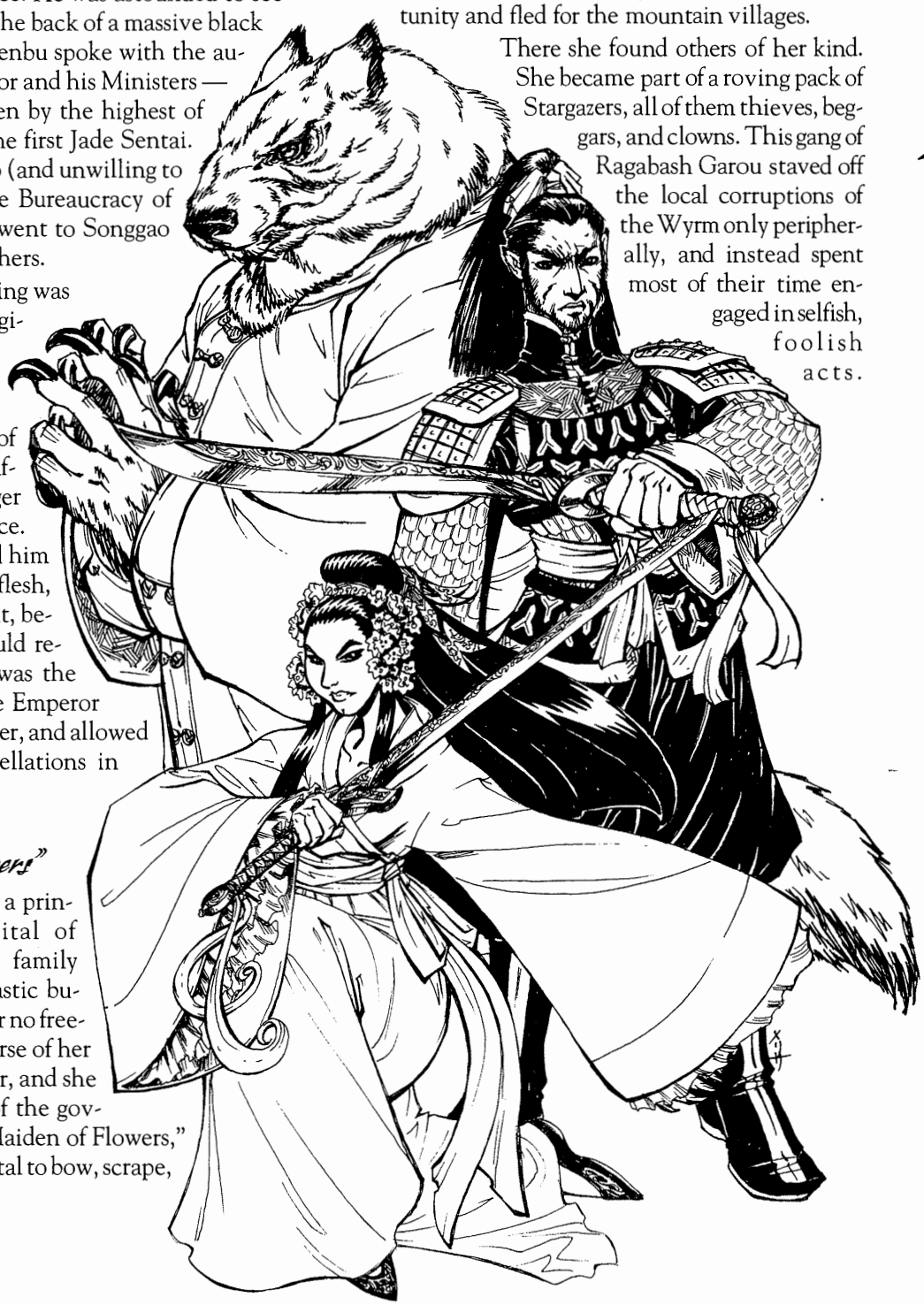
From then on, Kui-Xing was a powerful part of that original Jade Sentai, helping the others find balance in an increasingly disordered world. Toward the end of his life, Kui-Xing was afforded a chance to no longer have a hideous countenance. The Jade Emperor offered him respite from his disfigured flesh, but Kui-Xing didn't take it, believing that his Self should remain unchanged, for it was the very essence of him. The Emperor was pleased with the answer, and allowed Kui-Xing to place constellations in the sky as a reward.

Dha-shi-zhi, "The Maiden of Flowers"

It was difficult being a princess of the Tang capital of Chang'an. Dha-shi-zhi's family was a lot of corrupt dynastic bureaucrats who afforded her no freedom of decision. The course of her life was laid out before her, and she would serve at the side of the government as the divine "Maiden of Flowers," inspiring those of the capital to bow, scrape, and follow.

When her First Change came, no others were allowed to see her. She changed in plain sight of many of her family members, and she was sequestered away in a dark room in the palace. There was much fear that her skin had been taken by demons, and the family called for exorcists from Tibet to come and heal her soul or destroy her — whichever came first. For many days and nights the young girl sat in the darkness, weeping, until one night she woke from a fitful slumber to find that the door to her room was unbarred and open. The palace was in flames and under siege by an unknown clan of assassins. Uninterested in the reasons why, she seized the opportunity and fled for the mountain villages.

There she found others of her kind. She became part of a roving pack of Stargazers, all of them thieves, beggars, and clowns. This gang of Ragabash Garou staved off the local corruptions of the Wyrm only peripherally, and instead spent most of their time engaged in selfish, foolish acts.



Dha-shi-zhi learned to play the *shenghuang*, or "thirteen-pipes, and became a street musician usually drunk on rice-wine. Her young life was spent in much worthlessness, until one day the voice came from on high, a thunderous boom that only she could hear, almost rupturing her eardrums. She was called. The Jade Emperor demanded her presence.

For weeks she denied the voice, but it grew louder and louder. Soon she could do little more than whimper while laying in the muddy through-ways of the village. Half-mad and unable to concentrate, she began to stumble toward the distant Songgao Mountain. As she neared, the voices quieted and she was allowed some presence of mind once more. At the mountain, she was given her charge, and saddled with the other two, Jin Jia and Kui-Xing.

It took many years for her to find some moderation, and even then she was an overly free-spirited, impetuous girl. But she was a powerful ally in battle, able to dance with her magic sword and carve through whole swaths of the enemy. She adorned herself in bundles of red and white flowers, once again assuming the title of the "Maiden of Flowers."

Her life did not end peacefully. She and the Jade Sentai were called back to Chang'an and were given the task to destroy her own family, who had over the years become deeply entrenched with the taint of Kung-Kung. She was only partially prepared for the task, and found that her once-mortal mother was now something terrible, only half-human and half something else. She fell in battle against her, her throat slit by a silver blade.

Boroghul the Mad

Born a Mongol peasant in 1112, Boroghul is oft cited as a negative role-model for most Stargazers, but a hero to the Trappists, anti-Weaver members of the tribe.

Boroghul was a healer of the Tayichigud clan and a Theurge of the Stargazers; his life, like many of the Mongol Stargazers, was split between both worlds (mortal and Garou), with both sides being fully accepting of the other. He accompanied Mongol warriors on their incursions westward, but while martially-trained, was not a warrior himself. He spoke to spirits, he healed wounds, but he was not a fighter.

All of that changed when he neared middle age. He and his band of warriors were camped several miles outside the town of Liegnitz (now modern-day Legnica in Poland). Many Mongol men carried their women with them on many of the longer incursions, and Boroghul was no different. He brought along his intended, a young adolescent girl from the Arulad tribe. Boroghul cared after her as if she were his sister, and

called her Al Alta, "the Golden One." One day the men went out to scout ahead to track, and when they had returned a few weeks later, the women had been decimated by some kind of plague. The plague then left the men, too, ailing and dying. Only the hardiest survived, including Boroghul.

Boroghul did not go mad overnight; it was a slow process, arduous and painstaking. He discarded his healing ways and rejected the desire to balance his soul against the judges of his clan and of the Stargazer tribe, and over time he became a merciless warrior. He believed that the plague that had eradicated his friends and his loved one was orchestrated by the world of man – specifically, European man. He took his misplaced fury and stoked the coals long and hard, pointing all aggression toward the European cities on the fringes. They were places tainted by the gross manipulations of the white man, and Boroghul began associating the white men and the cities with the plague. It wasn't long before he began a crusade against all allies of the Weaver, hoping to gain some vengeance to satisfy the sorrow he held over the loss of his loved ones.

By the end, Boroghul was calling himself *Batachikan*, and claiming that he was one-third man, one-third wolf, and one-third demon, and was the progenitor of the Mongol peoples (despite evidence to the contrary). Boroghul became so maddened that he even began rejecting his own people, simply for their mastery of horses or for their reliance upon tools and weapons. His hatred for all things Weaver-tainted drove him to the limits of his sanity, and it wasn't long

before everything in front of his eyes stank of the Queen Maker. One day he fled into the Umbra, never to be seen again. Occasionally his incarnation manifests in unsuspecting Stargazers, particularly those who follow the Trappist path.

Bright Moon's Shadow

Bright Moon's Shadow was born 50 years ago in Calcutta, the child of two exiled Stargazers who left tribal life to pursue their selfish coupling. But not long after he was born, his "loving" parents left him in a trash-strewn alleyway to die. There they expected him to perish from exposure with no name and no chance.

He almost did perish; even the hardy construction of the Crinos child's body could not keep out the elements, the parasites, the dangerous rise and fall of temperature. But the child was discovered by a mixed pack of Garou — predominantly Bone Gnawer and Stargazer — led on by a pleading Chimerling. They were told where to look, and told that thereupon they would find a holy child, left to die. When they found the infant, they noted that half of the child's body was hairless and covered in an empurpled Port Wine stain, literally separating the one side of his body from the other. The pack considered this a blessing; his disfigurement was all that they had hoped for, a representation of the light and dark natures of the universe, a physical manifestation of both *yin* and *yang*. They took him to the caern north of the city, the Arm of Kolkata, and there the caern raised him as Bright Moon's Shadow.

For much of the middle half of his life, he lived as an East Bengal refugee called Kasba Jabardakhal (and even today he gladly accepts the moniker "Kasba").

There he immersed himself in the life of the refugees, protecting the disparate, casteless people from the depredations of sickness, hunger, and the outside corruptions from the Wyrm. He helped lead small revolutions, build villages and shanties for the immigrants, and stave off incursions from Pakistani rebels.

For the latter half of his life thus far, Bright Moon's Shadow has sat with the greatest of the Stargazer elders to help determine the course of his disordered tribe. He constantly struggled against the different factions within his own people. The Transcendent Stargazers believed that the tribe needed no direction; that, much like a river, it would go its own way and that was the proper direction no matter how or where it ended up. The Trappists felt that the tribe should take an aggressive stance against urban expansion, against the Weaver's creations, and against humans in general. Bright Moon's Shadow, along with a select few others, helped to maintain some semblance of order and direction within the tribe.

When Shigalu and other Stargazer caerns in the East fell to the Wyrm's cruelty, Bright Moon's Shadow began working on clandestine negotiations with the Beast Courts to allow his tribe to have a place among them. When the time came, he helped goad others into accepting the decision to exit the West and leave the ignorant Garou Nation behind. He also was one of the few Stargazers who spoke quietly at the concolation that year, announcing to all the other tribes of the Stargazers' intent.

It has been long enough now that the Stargazers should have a rightful place among the Beast Courts — but they do not. Some of their own caerns in the East have been "absorbed" into the Beast Courts, their own rule relinquished. While they are not treated with open disdain, the Stargazers who have "come home" have also not been greeted with a heroes' parade, either. There is always a quiet atmosphere surrounding the tribe, one that implies that perhaps they failed their homelands for too long, and should be willing to accept a period of shame for such digressions.

Now, Bright Moon's Shadow is mired in regret. His mind is turning the other way, despite the acceptance of the other tribal elders. Perhaps they made a mistake. Both East and West are halves of Gaia, and both are needed for balance. Could one choose only *yin* or only *yang* and still be complete? Speaking out about reversing the decision would bring him much personal shame, and it wouldn't make any difference anyhow. Or would it? Could there be other Stargazers — even other elders — who feel the way he does? Could a new balance be struck between the East and the West? For now, he is content to be patient. But such patience wears thin. Soon, he may have to speak out. And then he may have to act.

Rain-From-Heaven-High

The Stargazer tribe has long held a sept to protect the caern at Cheju Island, just south of Korea. They have had a presence there for over a thousand years, and even for the last several centuries the island has remained remote from Korea, holding a small population of people who were able to maintain tradition and live their lives without ever rubbing elbows with the Garou living there. The Stargazers used the caern (and the lava tunnels below, as the island is essentially one big dormant volcano) as a place of peace, meditation, and as a repository for much of their ancient lore.

But just over a decade ago, South Korea claimed the island, and began quickly turning it into a popular tourism spot, calling it "Korea's Hawaii." The Garou there have managed, adapting to the sudden population increase as best as can be expected. The edges of the bawn were hedged in, but since the caern remained underground (and underwater), the situation remained safe though uncomfortable.

Two years ago, however, the circumstances surrounding the sept and caern grew far more dangerous. Both South Korea and Japan began dumping industrial waste not far off the south end of the island. Combined with the already flagrant pollution from the boats, generators, and other industrial and electrical equipment, this additional contamination began killing much of the underwater wildlife while leaving the above-ground ecology fairly untouched. The totem spirit, the sea dragon Seiryuu, demanded that her children defend the caern from this depredations. But the Stargazers there were peaceful, and largely in accord with the natives, so they deliberated for a long time on a manner to help save their sacred place.

It was too late. By the time a plan had been realized, South Korea put in place a new governor to reign over Cheju Island, an awful man who long had given his soul over to the Wyrm. One night he commanded a number of American military men (stationed in Pyongyang) to hunt down a suspected clutch of "terrorists" and "pirates" living at the edges of the island. The military, using weapons meant to help oust the Garou there, laid waste to many of the Stargazers living there.

Rain-From-Heaven-High was one Cheju Island's Stargazers. She was one of the few, however, who managed to survive the attack. A young Rank 2 lupus, she remained living due to little more than luck, as she watched the rest of her sept be executed by the overwhelming forces.

The lupus, in an uncharacteristic move, vowed revenge, and began enacting a plan to obtain such vengeance. Long has the volcano on the island been dormant, but with the help of the old totem, Seiryuu, she has learned how to wake the slumbering spirit of the fire mountain. She has drawn others to her cause in an effort to wake the sleeping beast, with the intention of drawing down a terrible explosion of lava and ash upon the Weaver-gripped tourists and government ruining the once-beautiful island. This hope of murdering the Weaver's influence there has also attracted the attention of one of Shigalu's survivors — the Stargazer called Tara. Rain-From-Heaven-High has made much movements in learning the veneration rites meant to wake the spirit, and soon, with Tara's help, she may just succeed. The war, in their minds, has just begun. Shigalu — and Cheju Island — would never happen again.

Rain-From-Heaven-High is a young Garou, but is nevertheless a fierce fighter with a surprising depth of spiritual ability. She acts as Tara's secret second-in-command, and can often be seen at caerns around the world performing the commands of the Weaver-hating Trappists.

Antonine Teardrop

The Homecoming wasn't easy, not even for those Stargazers who believed in the action and the outcome. Decades ago, many Stargazers fled the instability of the East, and grew roots (whether desired or not) in the West. They became caern guardians, council

elders, teachers, protectors, and mediators. They made pacts with spirits. They became part of packs and followed new Totems. Even more importantly, they bred with their kin in the West, or found others to breed with when they could no longer contain their biological and spiritual urges. And from those seeds, Stargazers born in the West sprouted. Antonine Teardrop was one of these Stargazers.

And so, when the Homecoming was declared and the sum of all Stargazers was expected to drop what it was doing, some disagreed. Antonine wasn't precisely sold on the idea, and went to Tibet, India, and China to spend some time there during the Homecoming. He listened to their ideas, nodded at their plans, and then ultimately rejected them by returning back home to America. It wasn't an easy decision; his feelings regarding the tribal change (and his denial of it) were complex and filled with regret. On one hand, his brothers and sisters were making an awfully courageous move by returning to their ancestral lands. But on the other hand, weren't they acting both drastically and a little bit cowardly?

Antonine has accomplished much in his life, and he hasn't even neared old age, yet. He helped to oust the Seventh Generation, a clandestine Wyrm cult devoted to the abuses of women and children. As counsel and friend, he helped elevate Jonas Albrecht to the precarious position of *King* Albrecht, ruler of the Silver Fangs. He has fought on the side of Fera, rooted out secret lores, and mastered the Garou martial ability called Kailindo.

But sadly, all is far from perfect with Antonine. His current personal mission of researching and deciphering the danger of the Red Star has been waylaid by other more pressing (and unfortunate) concerns. Being a Western Stargazer who toes the middle line between the two sides of the world, he is often harangued or ignored by the other Garou. His fellow werewolves in the Nation consider him a Stargazer before they consider him anything else, and the prejudice against that tribe is growing. The Stargazers who relinquished their positions in the West to return to their spiritual homelands treat Antonine with distant respect — but respect accorded for an unwitting fool, if not a traitor. Antonine has unwillingly become a mouthpiece for his position, and he gains little ground in the effort. He believes that if he could discern the truth behind the Red Star, he could forestall or at least salve the coming Apocalypse, but it seems as if no others care to allow him that freedom.

Roleplaying Notes: Even amid the upheavals of the Northern Protectorate and your tribe's secession from the Nation, you retain a calm that's near-supernatural, no matter the situation. The most concern you show is a wrinkled forehead from time to time, just as the occasional enigmatic smile is the only hint at the theories and conundrums constantly swirling in your head.

Breed: Homid

Auspice: Philodox

Rank: 5

Physical: Strength 3 (5/7/6/4), Dexterity 4 (4/5/6/6), Stamina 3 (5/6/6/5)

Social: Charisma 4, Manipulation 4 (3/1/1/1), Appearance 3 (2/0/3/3)

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 5, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Primal-Urge 3

Skills: Animal Ken 3, Crafts 2, Etiquette 2, Leadership 3, Melee 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Knowledges: Enigmas 5, Investigation 4, Law 2, Medicine 4, Occult 5, Politics 2, Rituals 5

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Ancestors 3, Pure Breed 3, Resources 2

Rage: 4; **Gnosis:** 8; **Willpower:** 10

Gifts: (1) Persuasion, Resist Pain, Scent of the True Form, Truth of Gaia; (2) Jam Technology, Sight from Beyond, Surface Attunement, Strength of Purpose; (3) Clarity, Merciful Blow, Wisdom of the Ancient Ways; (4) Preternatural Awareness, Strike the Air; (5) Assimilation, Circular Attack, Wisdom of the Seer

Rites: Antonine has mastered almost all of the rites in the core **Werewolf** rulebook, and should lack knowledge of one only at the Storyteller's discretion.

Fetish: Wandering Thought (klaive)

Stargazers™

Name:	Breed:	Pack Name:
Player:	Auspice:	Pack Totem:
Chronicle:	Camp:	Concept:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Rituals	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts	Gifts
	○○○○○		
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Renown

Glory

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Honor

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Wisdom

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Rank

Rage

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Gnosis

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Willpower

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Health

Bruised		❑
Hurt	-1	❑
Injured	-1	❑
Wounded	-2	❑
Mauled	-2	❑
Crippled	-5	❑
Incapacitated		❑

Tribal Weakness

OBSESSIVE MIND GAMES

Scargazers™

Homid	Glabro	Crinos	Hispo	Lupus
No Change	Strength (+2)____	Strength (+4)____	Strength (+3)____	Strength (+1)____
	Stamina (+2)____	Dexterity (+1)____	Dexterity (+2)____	Dexterity (+2)____
	Appearance (-1)____	Stamina (+3)____	Stamina (+3)____	Stamina (+2)____
	Manipulation (-2)____	Appearance 0	Manipulation (-3)____	Manipulation (-3)____
		Manipulation (-3)____	+1 Die to Bite Damage	-2 Perception Diff.
Difficulty: 6	Difficulty: 7	Difficulty: 6	Difficulty: 7	Difficulty: 6

INCITE DELIRIUM IN HUMANS

Other Traits

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Fetishes

Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____
Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____
Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____
Item:_____ Level____ Gnosis____
Power:_____

Rites

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Combat

Maneuver/Weapon	Roll	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip

Brawling Chart

Maneuver	Roll	Diff	Damage
Bite	Dex+Brawl	5	Strength+1/A
Body Tackle	Dex+Brawl	7	Special/B
Claw	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength+1/A
Grapple	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength/B
Kick	Dex+Brawl	7	Strength+1/B
Punch	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength/B

A=Aggravated Damage
B=Bashing Damage

Armor:_____

Stargazers™

Nature: **Demeanor:**

Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Expanded Background

Allies

Mentor

Ancestors

Pure Breed

Kinfolk

Totem

Possessions

Gear (Carried):

Equipment (Owned):

Experience

TOTAL:

Gained From:

TOTAL SPENT:

Spent On:

Sept

Name:

Caern Location:

Level: Type:

Totem:

Leader:

Stargazers™

History

Prelude

Description

Age:
Hair:
Eyes:
Race:
Nationality:
Sex:

	Height	Weight
Homid:		
Glabro:		
Crinos:		
Hispo:		
Lupus:		

Battle Scars:

Metis Deformity:

Visuals

Pack Chart

Character Sketch

TRIBEBOOK: STARGAZERS™

Journey to the East

They came out of the East in search of wisdom, but found only strife. Now they have discovered that their homeland is no longer the refuge it once was, and that they have lost too much and gained too little. The wisest and most mystical of Garou tribes must now struggle to find its center and reclaim its heritage, before it falls apart. Is it already too late?

At What Cost Wisdom?

The Stargazers may have left the Garou Nation, but their lore hasn't been lost yet! **Tribebook: Stargazers** explores the hard choices the Stargazers have had to make, and the road that lies ahead of them — those that remain, and those that have moved on. Their Gifts and rites, their fetishes and totems are now all they have left to their name — will it be enough?

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